

Aide-de-Camp's Library



Rashtrapati Bhavan
New Delhi

Accn. No. 504

Call No. IX (6) - R

Aide-de-Camp's Library

GOVERNOR-GENERAL'S LIBRARY

No. C.5. "M+B"

Date

OFFICE OF THE MILITARY SECRETARY TO
THE GOVERNOR-GENERAL OF INDIA.

RULES FOR THE A.-D.-C.'s LIBRARY.

1. This Library is strictly for the use of His Excellency, his family and the Personal Staff.

2. The Library will remain open on week days only between the hours of 10 A.M. and 12 NOON, and 2 P.M. and 4 P.M.

3. Readers are allowed to take only three books a fortnight and after these are returned, new books will be issued.

4. Readers taking books out will ensure that they have filled in particulars in the Library Register maintained by Captain Davinder Singh, A.-D.-C. i/c., Library. *No Books will be issued from the Library without his knowledge.*

5. All care should be taken of the books and under no circumstances should be given to anyone on loan.

6. For any loss or damage, current cost of the book(s) will be realised.

D. N. PRAKASH, *Sqn.-Leader,*
Dy. Military Secy. to the Governor-General.

JUAN BELMONTE
KILLER OF BULLS



Juan Belmonte

JUAN BELMONTE KILLER OF BULLS



ILLUSTRATED

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY OF A MATADOR



As told to
MANUEL CHAVES NOGALES

Translated from the Spanish and with a note
on bullfighting by **Leslie Charteris** 1937

LONDON WILLIAM HEINEMANN, LTD. TORONTO



PRINTED IN GREAT BRITAIN
AT THE WINDMILL PRESS, KINGSWOOD, SURREY

CONTENTS

INTRODUCTION

A NOTE ON BULLFIGHTING

page 1

PART ONE

THE BEGINNING

page 31

PART TWO

STRUGGLE AND CONQUEST

page 63

PART THREE

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY

page 163

PART FOUR

—AND THE PRICE

page 223

EPILOGUE

page 313

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing Page</i>
Juan Belmonte, killer of bulls	8
The <i>verónica</i> , as done by Belmonte, in Lima, with one of the best bulls he ever met	9
The <i>media verónica</i> , caught as the cape flares around his hips	9
Another glimpse of Belmonte's characteristic <i>media verónica</i>	24
Belmonte's <i>pase ayudado</i> , that is, aided with the sword, also called the <i>pase de castigo</i>	24
Belmonte in a <i>pase de pecho</i>	24
Belmonte in a <i>pase natural</i>	24
Belmonte in another <i>natural</i>	25
A <i>natural</i> with the left hand	25
A <i>pase de pecho</i> with the left hand	56
Belmonte doing a <i>molinete</i>	56
Two of Belmonte's gorings	57
"I felt its quivering mass brushing against my body"	72
"We stood like statues, impassively offering it our naked bodies bathed by the moonlight"	73
"I rushed at the bull like a madman, shrieking abuse at it and raining blows on it with hands and feet"	104
"The menacing white horns of the bull loomed mercilessly over me"	105
"I did my <i>verónicas</i> and <i>media verónicas</i> standing very close and with my hands very low, as we used to do in the country"	120

ILLUSTRATIONS

	<i>Facing Page</i>
<i>"I was in ecstasy. I watched it in amazement as it crumpled up and died there without another touch"</i>	121
Belmonte killing <i>recibiendo</i> —a perfect <i>estocada</i>	152
But if he makes a mistake, this will be the result	152
An <i>adorno</i> , in a statuesque moment of classical beauty	153
A <i>pase natural por alto</i>	168
<i>"I dragged myself into the ring, almost unable to walk, opened the cape, and gave my lesson as best I could"</i>	169
<i>"I gave it five smooth and slow verónicas, which were perhaps the best I have done in my life"</i>	200
<i>"There came a time when I felt myself wrapped up in the bull, melted into one with it"</i>	201
An <i>adorno</i> may literally mean taking the bull by the horn, but the matador will still have a chance to defend himself if the bull makes a sudden movement	216
Another of Belmonte's gorings	216
An incomparable <i>pase de pecho</i> , so close that the bull brushing past will leave its loose hairs on Belmonte's costume	217
<i>"Profiling," poised for the estocada</i>	248
Belmonte goes in to kill with a <i>volapié</i> , and the bull founders and goes down while he holds up his hand to order his cuadrilla not to interfere, knowing that the bull will be dead before its knees buckle	249
Belmonte's favourite sport—tilting at bulls in the open country	264
<i>Rejoneando</i> —fighting from horseback	264
A <i>desplante</i> and an <i>adorno</i> by Belmonte, in his last season	265

ILLUSTRATIONS IN THE TEXT

	Page
<i>"When they found me I was kneeling in front of the becerro with my cloth spread out under its very nose"</i>	59
<i>"When it had us on the ground it would trample on us, dribble over us, bite us"</i>	71
<i>"Naturally, the one who had to perform the Don Tancredo was myself"</i>	107
<i>"I used my left for all my work with the muleta . . ."</i>	211
<i>"I concluded with such a fortunate recorte that it left the impression that the bull was a plastic mass"</i>	239
<i>"Joselito drew the bull towards him with his marvellous cape in another flowing and unhurried pass"</i>	241
<i>"Every day we rode out together to take part in the work"</i>	261

JUAN BELMONTE

INTRODUCTION

A NOTE ON BULLFIGHTING

JUAN BELMONTE was born on the 14th of April 1892 in the Calle de la Feria, which is a street in one of the poor quarters of Sevilla. He was the eldest of a family of five, which was later increased to eleven with the help of his father's second wife. His grandfather left them one of those small shops which sell paper and ink and lace and needles and all manner of assorted oddments, and the whole family was brought up on the meagre profits of this business. What with the number of mouths to be fed and the number of straggling infants to be looked after, you couldn't expect that any of them would be brought up in the hygienic and scientific way that children are supposed to be brought up in today, or the way their parents would like to bring them up; Juan Belmonte's parents probably didn't think about this, being simple people who didn't know much about science and hygiene but just had a lot of children; it was just one of the facts of life, and Juanito had to grow up pretty well on his own, like the others. Which is a brief and comprehensive summary of his background. He was a slum child, brought up in poverty, Spanish poverty, which is so much poorer than any poverty in the English-speaking countries that you have to see it before you know what it means; he was a gutter-snipe if you like, scrambling and squalling in the streets with other equally ragged urchins almost as soon as his legs would carry him, turned out of the house to get him out of the way, pilfering from stall-keepers,

INTRODUCTION

hundred years, a literature of bullfighting which is probably as voluminous in proportion to the number of people interested as the literature of any other art. And like any other subject which people are interested in studying and talking about and discussing and writing about, it has built up at the same time a special vocabulary which is more extensive and precisely defined and full of more closely-drawn and accurately understood shades of meaning than any other special vocabulary I can think of. For instance, we have in English only one word for a bull. We call it a bull, and it is either a bull or it isn't; in Spanish, according to its age, it is either a *becerro*, a *novillo*, or a *toro*. This is just the beginning. Each of these words can be varied by the addition of some of the many Spanish suffixes, all of which will give it a faintly different shade of meaning which can only be translated so clumsily and elaborately that it is probably better not to translate it at all, and just call the animal a bull; and then you aren't very much luckier because off-hand I can think of half a dozen synonyms in Spanish for speaking of a bull just as an animal without being particular about its age or size, and probably there are a dozen more that I can't remember. After which I could list 45 precise words describing the colouring of the bull, 21 describing the formation of the horns, and 20 describing their fighting characteristics; and none of these could be adequately conveyed in much less than a sentence. The whole of the bullfight in all its phases is similarly wrapped up in such a richness of vocabulary that any translation must seem monotonous in comparison; and the names of the various passes alone are completely untranslatable, and I have made no attempt to render them in English. For the rest, I have simply done the best I can, leaving out any technicalities that have nothing to do with the story, reducing the others as much as possible, and explaining

some of them in the footnotes. This is the story of a man and not a treatise on bullfighting.

At the same time it has been convincingly pointed out to me that the story of the man loses much of its significance unless you know what he was doing, and therefore that I ought to say something about bullfighting that will explain it a little to readers who know nothing about it except what their friends have told them or what they have read in tracts from the R.S.P.C.A. or who may have seen one corrida while they were "doing" Spain and were probably sick over the horses and didn't know what all the rest of it was about. There can be very few other subjects that so many people are so ready to express such violent opinions about without having any first-hand or even competent second-hand knowledge of it, and therefore a few brief explanations at this point may be made without any more excuses.

The origin of the bullfight as a standardised spectacle is the subject of a good many speculative theories which need not trouble us very much just now. As it exists to-day, it consists in the ceremonious killing of a number of bulls, generally six, according to a formalised and traditional sequence of manœuvres designed to display the skill and valour of the torero and the power and bravery of the bull, while at the same time taking advantage of the bull's fighting instincts to bring it into the condition and position in which it can be perfectly killed according to the rules of the art. I know that we are going to have an argument about all that, but we will leave it until we have finished the exposition.

Anyone who plays bulls is a torero. The man who kills the bull is a matador. The word *matador* means "killer." Usually from two to four matadors will take part in a corrida, and each of them will fight and kill two or three bulls. Each matador is the head man of

INTRODUCTION

a cuadrilla which probably consists of two picadors, men on horseback armed with lances, and two banderilleros, which means simply the men who place the banderillas, or wooden darts about two feet long wrapped in paper of various colours and tipped with steel barbs. Sometimes the matador will do this himself, if he is any good at it, and sometimes when he isn't; but the men are still called banderilleros or *peones*. Only the cuadrilla of the matador whose bull is being fought will be inside the arena at that time; the other cuadrillas wait on the safe side of the barrera, which is a circular wooden fence running round the arena and forming a kind of trench between the arena and the spectators in the stands. In this trench also walk about the carpenters, the *monosabios* or bullring attendants, the *mozos de espadas* who look after the matadors' swords, and various officials, managers, photographers, reporters, and policemen waiting to capture any of the spectators who jump into the ring and try to take on the bull themselves. The safety of this trench is more or less relative, for bulls have been known to jump over the barrera into it and do much havoc. The other matadors will not be inside it: they will be in the arena, ready to come to the assistance of the working matador in case of accidents, and also to play their proper part in the *quites*.

The bull is only distantly related to the animal which is reared for beef in other countries. It is a practically wild animal whose chief instinct is to fight, and it is one of the fiercest and bravest animals in the world. The bull you will see today has been bred from some famous strain renowned for many years for its fighting qualities, and for many years a deliberate process of scientific selection will have been employed to ensure that the product will combine the finest qualities of strength and courage and ferocity in the breed, just as other cattle have been bred for years to give

the maximum quantity of milk, or racehorses are bred for speed and stamina. This bull, to meet the regulations which govern bullfighting, will weigh not less than 543 kilos on the hoof, about 1194 pounds or more than half a ton; probably it will be bigger than this. The most distinguishing thing about it, apart from its obvious size and power, will be the tremendous hump of muscle running from the back of the horns to the centre of the back. This is the bull's fighting muscle, it is what holds his head up and lifts his head, with anything on it, so that he can lift and throw up a horse and rider together on his horns. Now the regulations prescribe that the matador must kill the bull with a sword by thrusting the sword into the bull's back between the shoulder-blades and into the bull's chest, while facing the bull and thrusting in over his horns; so one of the objects of the fight is to tire the bull's neck and tire this great muscle so that the bull will lower his head, because until the bull will lower his head and keep it down it is impossible to make this thrust. The other object is to steady the bull so that it will be possible to get into position to make the thrust. And these things must be done valiantly, artistically, gracefully, and according to a fixed and timed procedure, so that the tempo of the fight rises through a crescendo like great music to the supreme emotion of the last moments.

When the bull is let out of the toril or pen it is a wild and savage animal. It has been shut up in the dark for some hours, and now it is prodded out into the blazing sunlight of the arena, at first thinking that it is charging out into the freedom of the pasture in which it grew up, and then finding that it is only in another enclosure even if this is a larger one. The bull is raging, fighting mad; and you only have to see it as it comes thundering out into the arena to have half your humanitarian instincts numbed. You

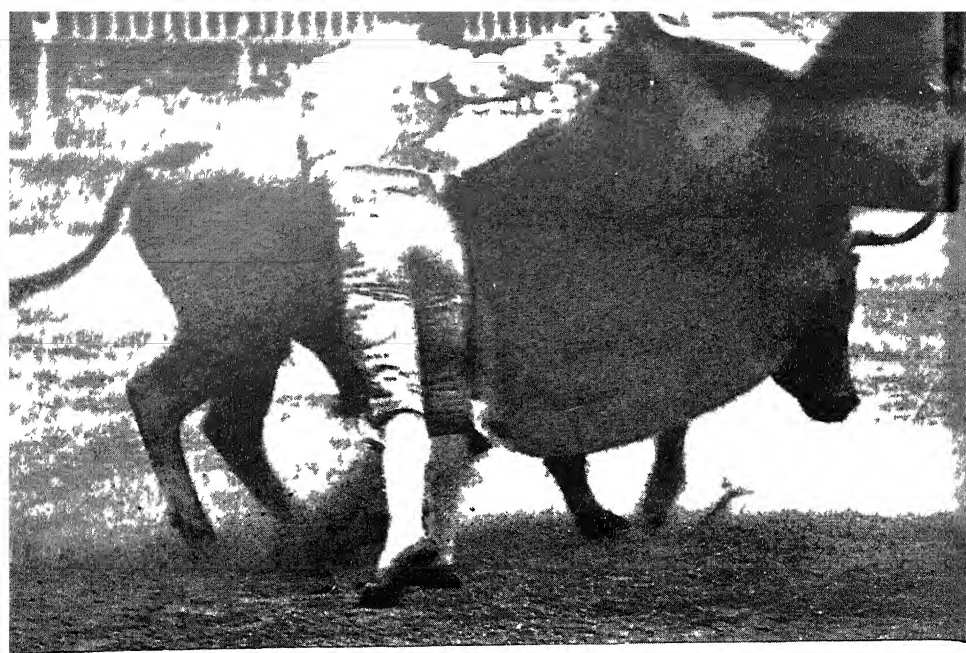
INTRODUCTION

will stop thinking about the poor helpless bull and feel about it as you would feel about a tiger, the same admiration and awed respect tinged with fear. You will feel that you would as soon be in a cage with an angry tiger as down there in the arena with the bull; and this is the animal that the matador has to dominate until he can stand in front of it and dive in over its horns after his sword.

Now the matador is not in the arena when the bull comes in; he is standing in the shelter of one of the burladeros, which are small secondary fences built out a man's thickness from the barrera and parallel with it, where a man can take refuge if he is hard pressed. They also mask the openings in the barrera itself through which the toreros can enter and leave the ring. The only men in the ring now are the banderilleros with their capes, which are just like ordinary long heavy capes made of raw silk, yellow on one side and cerise-coloured on the other—bulls are no more sensitive to red than to any other bright colour. The banderilleros "run" the bull, while the matador watches: that is, they run away from the bull, trailing their capes behind them and letting the bull charge and gore at their capes, without letting it get close to them, and if it comes dangerously close they will duck behind one of the burladeros. You may think they are all afraid of the bull and none of them dares to stand up to it and pass it properly as the matador is going to do. You would be wrong; they are simply playing their appointed part in the fight, and they are not allowed to make passes with their capes, which they only use to protect themselves in the same crude way that a man might use a coat to protect himself if he was being pursued by an angry bull in a field, if he had the knowledge and presence of mind to do it. They are doing two useful things: they are taking the first fierce wild uncontrolled impetus off the bull's charge, which is important because the matador cannot sculpture



JUAN BELMONTE, KILLER OF BULLS.



The *verónica*, as done by Belmonte, in Lima, with one of the best bulls he ever met.

The *media verónica*, caught as the cape flares around his hips.



the tight disciplined figures which his art demands out of a wildly charging bull, and they are also giving the watching matador his chance to observe and study the fighting characteristics of the bull, whether it charges in a straight line or in a curve, and how it moves its head, and whether it has a tendency to hook with the right horn or with the left. It is on what the matador learns from this first study, only a few seconds of it, that he is going to gamble his life, when he will be working so close to the bull that the bull's horns will brush against his legs and the bull's shoulder will brush by his body, if he is any good, when he makes the formal passes which are required of him. And as soon as the matador feels that he has learned enough, he steps out from behind the burladero into the path of the bull and gives it a few passes with the cape.

There are many different passes with the cape, and there may always be new ones if the bullfighters are born who will invent them, as Rodolfo Gaona and Chicuelo have given their names to the *gaonera* and the *chicuelino*; but all of these passes are formalised and standardised like the steps in a ballet, only that this is a ballet with agonising death for a partner, and the foundation of all work with the cape is the *verónica*, which is one of the supreme tests of the torero's skill and courage and which was one of the brilliant peaks of Belmonte's work. The *verónica* is the cape equivalent of the *pase natural* with the muleta, which we shall come to presently, and you could probably say that it is the most natural pass of all. The torero holds up the cape by the shoulders, with his left shoulder towards the bull, and standing in the straight line of the bull's body, with the cape spread across the bull's probable line of charge; and as the bull charges him he lets the bull take the cloak and keeps its attention on the cloak, so that it follows the cloak instead of driving its horns into him and charges past him,

INTRODUCTION

while he keeps his feet and legs firmly planted and only turns himself from the waist, sculpturing such a figure as you will see in the illustrations; and then if he has done this perfectly you will hear a concerted staccato roar of "Olé!" from the *aficionados*, whom you might call the fans of bullfighting, and the matador will have turned a little so that as the bull turns and doubles on itself to charge again he will be ready to give it another *verónica*. He will give it a number of passes, the number depending on how courageous and skilful he is and how brave the bull is and how well he can control it to keep it charging him instead of galloping away in search of another target; and when he is finished he will terminate with a *recorte*, a pass ending in a deft flick of the cloth, like a *media verónica*, which begins like a *verónica* except that the matador fixes his hands at his hips as he turns and turns in the opposite direction so that the cape winds itself round him like a spread crinoline. The sudden distracting flash of colour serves to fix the bull where it stands, so that it stands still and is momentarily baffled, and the matador should be able to turn his back on it and walk slowly away with the cape over his arm, to the tune of a round of applause if his work has been good, while the bull simply watches him without charging; although if he is mistaken and he has not fixed the bull he may get a horn in his rectum and that may be the end of him. But if this is not the end of him, the trumpets will be sounded for the second quarter of the fight, which is the *suerte de varas*, the feat of the lances, the work of the picadors.

Now while the picadors are riding in on their shabby horses, you must think a little more about the bull, for all the work in a bullfight is directed against the bull with an intelligent object. The bull is also intelligent, so intelligent that if the tempo of the fight is not perfectly controlled and if the fight goes on even ten minutes

longer than it should go on, the bull may become so wise that it will be unplayable and unkillable according to the rules. The assets of the bull are its power and strength and speed and courage, its fearless fighting instinct to charge any other creature on sight; its asset to the bullfight is its natural tendency to charge in a straight continuous line once it has picked its object; and its handicap to itself is its tendency to have its attention distracted by any movement in its field of vision, which is the handicap on which all the matador's work is based, by directing the bull's attention away from himself towards the cape or muleta. This bull which we are seeing fought has no knowledge of man, and it has never been misled by a cape or muleta; if it had ever been played before it would be unplayable now, for it would have learned too much; this is its first experience of the wiles of a new enemy, and all through the fight it is searching for ways to overcome them. All its life, in its fights with other bulls on the ranges, it has been used to normal objects behaving in a normal manner. It has been used to charging a target and finding the target there when its horns arrive, and it has never dreamed that it might be possible for a target to dissolve into unresisting silk when the charge hits it. Now it has charged several times and met no resistance, and the last *recorte* of the matador has completed the work of upsetting it. The bull is baffled, and it is thinking: "Am I wasting my time charging shadows? Am I just being made a fool of?" It is also thinking: "What can I do to give my charges more effect?" And while you may now be beginning to think pityingly about the poor bull, you should really be thinking about the poor matador, because his bull is becoming wiser and more dangerous, and it is going to charge more dangerously, more deliberately, even while you are thinking that it has lost heart. It is like a tennis-player who has been hitting

INTRODUCTION

and smashing wildly in a first attempt to slog his opponent off the court, and who finds every shot neatly returned, and who has to settle down to play more methodically and try to discover his opponent's weaknesses. The bull is no nearer than that to admitting defeat; and as it tires a little it is conserving its strength only to use it better, to make every charge and thrust to the best effect.

So the picadors ride in and the bull's attention is drawn to the man on horseback, who looks more like the creatures the bull has been used to; and the bull is encouraged and charges again, at the man and the horse. These horses are protected by a kind of mattress-like armour strapped over one side and under the belly, which the law has required since 1928. It is supposed to save the horses, and sometimes it does, but not always. The picador's right leg is also protected with steel armour, and this is supposed to save him, but it will not help him much if he is thrown off. As the bull charges, the picador will place the point of his lance in the bull's hump of muscle, if he is skilful and quick enough; and he is theoretically supposed to prevent the bull from reaching the horse. The trouble is that there are not many picadors to-day like José Trigo, who could hold off a six-year-old bull with the blunt end of the lance; or Corchado, who never wore armour and would use the same mount through an entire corrida and never get a scratch either in the horse's hide or his own silk stockings. Besides, there are many matadors who believe that a bull must *enganchar*, must get its horn into living resisting flesh, to make it good for the fight, and also if the bull gets the horse and lifts it it helps to tire the bull's neck and make it carry its head lower, which we have already listed as one of the objects of the fight, and also there is a superstition that a goring from a horn which has been sunk in a horse's body will never turn septic and will heal quicker than a wound from a clean

horn. Also it is not so easy to sink a lance in exactly the right place in the hump of a charging bull, and besides if the bull does not upset a few horses the public may think it is not very brave; so the chances are that the bull will get the horse, with or without taking the pic. A picador acting on the instructions of a cowardly and unscrupulous matador can ruin a bull for the rest of the fight: for instance, he can place the pic too far back and injure the bull's spine, or when he has the pic in and feels the resistance of the bull he may twist it about and try to make a large wound so that the bull will be weakened by bleeding. But even if he does his work well and turns the bull away, the bull may free himself and return to the charge too quickly, and get the horse in the flank which is unprotected; or the picador may place the pic right and find the force of the bull too great for his strength. The guard above the point of the lance will still allow the blade to drive in about six inches; but I have seen bulls with the pic in them driving steadily in against it, with their feet thrusting and their whole bodies leaning forward, still trying to get at the man and horse in spite of the punishment. That is the kind of bravery a fighting bull has. So the bull may always get the horse, even if it is only the battering-ram force of the charge blunted by the mattress that topples the horse over; and once the horse is down the bull may go on charging before it can be taken away, and get its horn under the mattress. It may just as well do the same thing to the picador, but no humanitarian would worry very much about him. In any case, it is now the duty of the matador to make the *quite*.

In the *quite*, the matador must first take the bull's attention away with his cape, and then continue to play it with the same kind of passes as were used in the preliminary cape work, finishing with a *recorte* which serves to fix the bull in position for the next horse.

INTRODUCTION

In these *quites* the matador should do his best work with the cape, for the bull is in the best condition to be played. It has found new heart from charging and achieving something, and it should charge now with more zeal and shrewd ferocity than ever before; but it will still be less wild, and more dangerous, because it has not forgotten its first lesson in the untrustworthiness of the lure, and because it is tiring a little more and has to make every movement count.

In the *quites* you should begin to feel the pull of that quality in the fight which the Spaniards call *emoción*. "Emotion" doesn't have quite the same meaning in English, but you can't find any other translation for it. You have seen the bull in its first wild fierceness, you have seen proof of its strength and fierceness and bravery in the way it went in against the pic and threw over the picador and his horse like a sack of potatoes; and now there is one man, the matador, armed only with the cape and his skill and knowledge of bullfighting, meeting the bull alone, playing it, keeping it charging the cape and not himself, controlling the bull, steadying its rush, keeping it close to him, dominating it, holding it with the cloth as if with a magnet, weaving that earth-shaking mass of savage flesh around his body as if it were something smooth and plastic, and doing all this, if he is doing it well, as smoothly and gently and gracefully as a dancer, sculpturing the poised and airy attitudes of his slender body against the dark destroying mass of the bull, seemingly without effort, seemingly without risk—until you remember what the bull did to the horses and you realise again what a bull can do and what it would do even more easily to the matador if he made one miscalculation.

It is a regulation—not always observed—that each bull must take a minimum of four pics. The first *quite* is made by the matador

whose bull it is, and the subsequent ones by the other matadors appearing in the corrida in order of seniority, and their individual rivalry should show in each of them trying to make a better and more valiant *quite* than the others. Then, at the next trumpet signal, the surviving horses are ridden out and the fight goes into its third quarter, which is the *banderillas*.

Unless the matador is placing the *banderillas* himself, he rests during this quarter in preparation for his *faena* with the *muleta*, while one of the other matadors stays in the ring to be ready to come to the rescue of any unlucky *banderillero*. To my mind it is the least interesting part of the fight, probably because it is usually done without any inspiration, which is because the matador would not want one of his *banderilleros* to steal the limelight with any showy work. The *banderillas* are placed by a man standing with one in each hand, held by the blunt end with the point downwards, and his arms held above his head and opened a little; he cites the bull, and as the bull charges him he runs towards it at an angle, halts at the right place, brings his feet together for an instant, leans forward over the horns, and nails the *banderillas* in the hump, where they stick by reason of the barbs, after which he runs on to safety, while the bull checks and tosses its head up, distracted by the sudden pain, and gives him the chance to get away. Three or four pairs of *banderillas* will be placed by the *banderilleros* working alternately, and if they are perfectly placed in a perfect bull they will be three on each side of the centre, avoiding the wounds made by the *pics*, and marking round the exact spot which the matador will later have to aim for with his sword when he makes the kill; but they may be deliberately placed on one side by a skilful *banderillero* to correct a tendency that the bull has to hook to that side which the matadors have not been able to cure with their

INTRODUCTION

cape work. There are several other fancy ways of placing the banderillas which are more ornamental to watch, but these are nearly always performed by the matador, if he fancies himself in this phase of the work; and the room for emotion is there, with the poising of the man with his feet together at the moment when he places the darts, the statuesque moment when the darts are going in and the bull's horns are passing under his belly as his body sways aside. But you will very rarely see it, and it must always be inferior to the emotion of the moment of death, when the matador is one with the bull, not separated from it as the banderillero must be. The banderillas, of course, like everything else in the bullfight, have their use: besides correcting any of the bull's tendencies to hook, they go on with the work of tiring the bull, particularly tiring its neck as it shakes its head to try and shake out the darts, and they encourage the bull to concentrate on a smaller target, the banderillero unshielded by a cape, in preparation for the faena or work with the muleta, which comes next.

The muleta is an oval piece of red cloth with a stick about eighteen inches long laid and fastened lengthwise in the centre. The cloth is doubled over the stick so that it hangs down like a curtain. The matador may hold the muleta in either hand, but the sword is always held in the right hand; so that if he holds the muleta in his right hand the sword helps to spread the cloth and make it larger, whereas if he holds the muleta in his left hand he has a much smaller lure with which to keep the bull's attention away from his own body. For this reason work done with the muleta in the left hand is esteemed more highly.

With the muleta the matador goes out alone. He stands under the presidential box and holds out his hat in salute, and either dedicates the bull to the president, or, with the president's per-

mission, to some friend among the spectators; or he may go into the centre of the ring and wave his hat around the circle of the stands to dedicate the bull to the whole audience. Then he throws his hat away, to whoever has received the dedication, to hold for him while he is doing his faena, and goes towards the bull.

Now you are going to see the quintessence of bullfighting, the final crescendo of emotion rising to the supreme moment of the kill. It is on his work with the muleta that a matador's reputation ultimately stands or falls: it was with the muleta that Belmonte touched his greatest heights. The passes again are as varied as the lances with the cape, and several of them are illustrated in the course of the text. They are founded on the *pase natural*, the natural pass, which is the simplest and most dangerous and most beautiful to watch. In the *pase natural*, the matador stands with the muleta in one hand, his arm hanging down at full stretch and spread a little way from his side, so that the cloth barely covers his legs; he cites the bull, and as it charges he leads it past him, so that its horns brush his thighs if he dares to bring it so close, and its shoulders will rub his waist, while he sculptures the same kind of graceful figure as he did with the cape, keeping his feet and legs firm and gracefully placed, turning from the waist only, controlling the bull, dominating it, working with all the knowledge he possesses of its instincts to weave it about him like a flowing veil; and then he should be ready and the bull turned and controlled so that it will charge again. Then he will give it another *natural* or a *pase de pecho*, all the time playing with the bull, moving it as he wants it to move, commanding it, forcing it by his art to join him like a conscious partner in that strange and sinisterly beautiful dance of death. And then he will change his position and go into another series of passes, continuous, linked together by form and rhythm,

INTRODUCTION

which should be as complete and conclusive as a melody in music; and then perhaps he will have the bull fixed and baffled and at a standstill, and if he is valiant and trusts his judgment he will pause for an *adorno*. He will put his hand out slowly and take hold of the bull's horn, or take hold of its ear, or kneel down with his back to the bull and face the stands; and by this time they will be cheering and applauding him if he has been good, and he will get up again and go on with his faena. All this is the final stage in the work of tiring the bull, and lowering its head, and steadying it so that when the time comes the matador will be able to make his kill properly; and if he is going to attempt to kill valiantly and conscientiously, and if the bull has not been ruined before this by a pic in the spine or some cruel work with the cape that has strained its back by turning it too quickly, it will depend very much on his work with the muleta whether the matador will see the bull swaying and foundering after he has gone in with the sword, or whether the horn will catch him in the thigh as he goes in and send him up to the sky and down again to his death. But this is not what you need to be thinking about now, because the work must be done in such and such a way and it must be beautiful to watch, and if it isn't beautiful to watch it is a bad faena even if the matador does kill the bull properly at the end of it. What he should be doing is performing his task with so much grace and beauty that you are not conscious of the practical end of it. It must not be monotonous, but full of variations; it must take you through all the emotions that the genius of the matador is great enough to wring from you. It must have light and shade, it must be sometimes grave and sober and sometimes airy and light-hearted, sometimes tragic and sometimes gay. You must feel that the matador is giving you his best, because this is the best thing he knows in life and he is doing it in

the best way he knows; and you must feel that he is serious even when he is being gay, because the end of all this is death, and he must not make you feel that he is being flippant about death even when he is lightening it, because death is not flippant to him. You must feel that he has pride and responsibility, because if the death of the bull is not justified by the beauty which eventually necessitates it, then the bullfight is as cruel and pointless as the humanitarians would like you to believe.

But if you have seen the perfect faena, and all the emotion of the fight has reached its peak and held it, just so long as is necessary for perfection, the time has come for the kill.

The bull is standing still, with its forefeet together and its head lowered. The matador stands facing the bull, at the right distance, with his feet together and his whole body poised straight on the balls of his feet, with the muleta held in his left hand and hanging down over his feet and the lower part of his legs. He has fixed the bull's eye on the muleta, and he is "profiling," as they call it: the sword is held in his right hand, stretched out towards the bull, and he is sighting along the sword at the place where the sword has to go. Now he may either kill *recibiendo*, receiving, that is letting the bull charge him and receiving the bull on his sword, or with a *volapié*, that is diving in with the sword while the bull stands still, or *al encuentro*, which is a combination of the two with both the bull and the man moving towards each other; but whichever of these he is doing he will have to move his left hand across his body with the muleta at the crucial moment to draw the bull's head to his right while he himself sways to the left and slips out over the bull's right horn. If this has been a perfect *estocada* the bull will stand there with the sword in it and only the hilt showing, with its four feet squarely planted as if to brace itself, and in a moment or two it

INTRODUCTION

will crumple down and be dead. If it was a bad *estocada* the bull may not be mortally wounded, and it may shake the sword out if the sword ever stayed in. Maybe the matador never went in, if he was frightened: that is to say that he may have started to come out before he was in, and the thrust was only a *pinchazo*, a pin-prick. Then you may see the peones flapping their capes to make the bull turn round and round in a circle, to make it dizzy and help it to bleed internally and make it go down so that it can be finished off easily. The law requires the matador to go in once over the horns, but only once, so that if he has no stomach for another attempt he will try to get rid of the bull with a *descabello*. This is quite humane if he can make the bull lower its head so that he can find the right place at the back of its skull with the point of his sword and sever the cervical vertebræ with a quick downward thrust; but if the bull is still full of life it will rear its head when it feels the point, and the matador will make a lot of bungling attempts before he gets rid of the beast, and the stands will be howling and whistling, and it will all be a very messy and disgusting business, spoiling all the effect of the faena if there ever was an effect with a matador like that, and you will be quite right to throw the bottles you have thoughtfully brought with you, if you think you can get away with it without being spotted by a policeman. But if you see a perfect *estocada* at the end of a perfect faena, it is the final resolving chord, the supreme breathless moment. You will see man and bull, who have been gyrating together like partners in a dance, suddenly welded together, the man merged with the bull, bound to the bull by the sword, with the steel vanished altogether and only the man's hand grasping the hilt of the sword on the crest of the bull's back, the matador with the bull's horns under him and his body bowed over the bull; and it will be something that you will never forget.

So now that is your bullfight, and if it still means nothing to you, you should go and see some for yourself—the mere description of it, after all, can convey very little more than the verbal description of a symphony. You will have to see at least a dozen bullfights before you can begin to recognise and understand their finer points, even with the help of all the books in the world, because your eye will not be quick and trained enough to grasp them; just the same as if you were taking up music for the first time you would have to go to a lot of concerts before you could hear much more than the tunes. And then you may have to see twenty bad or mediocre bullfights before you see a complete and perfect one, because matadors are as temperamental as any other kind of artist and they all have many off days, and because almost as much depends on the bull as on the matador and the bulls are not always good, and finally because there are always many unscrupulous and over-ballyhoed matadors, and a man who is getting a thousand pounds for each corrida is inclined to do a lot of simple arithmetic about what it will cost him to get a goring that will lose him half a dozen fights, and it is impossible for a matador to do any good work unless he gets close enough to the bull to run a genuine risk of being gored. But if you ever do see a sublime faena you will know you have seen it, and if it still means nothing to you you had better give it up and go back to fox-hunting and pigeon-shooting and other inelegant but humanitarian activities.

This introduction is not intended to be a defence of bullfighting, although it is practically impossible for a man to write about any subject that means something to him without showing his own feelings, and I have made no effort to conceal mine. At the same time I have no fond belief that anything I write will make any sensational changes in the popular Anglo-Saxon attitude towards

INTRODUCTION

bullfighting. Bullfighting is a subject about which any man can only form his own sincere opinion in accordance with the scale of æsthetic and other values to which he subscribes. I can do very little more than indicate what it is about a bullfight that grips the *aficionado*, and combat a few common misconceptions. One frequently hears, for instance, the uninformed old-maid's bleat about "a poor bull being tortured all the afternoon." The life of a bull in the arena averages, as a matter of fact, about twenty minutes, from the time it is let out of the toril until the mules drag out its dead body. Certainly the bull is killed. Other cattle are also killed for meat; and as a matter of fact the fighting bull is also dressed and sold after the *corrida*, and excellent meat it is too. Certainly it must be admitted that the bull is wounded during the fight, with the *pics* and *banderillas*; but these are straightforward wounds with clean sharp steel, which anyone who has been stabbed or cut knows are not excruciatingly painful, at least until afterwards, and for the bull there is no afterwards. Everyone also knows that men do not feel pain very much when their blood is hot, for instance when they are wounded in a fight, and I see no reason why bulls should be considered more sensitive than human beings. But certainly bulls are killed, and possibly suffer a little more pain in dying than they would suffer in a scientific slaughter-house; and certainly horses are often disembowelled, even if they are broken-down horses with very little more life left in them; these are the cold facts of bullfighting. The point to consider is whether the artistic result justifies the abuse of the material, and that is a question which cannot be judged on a basis of pure sentimentality. It must be judged entirely on its own merits, because the art of the *torero* has no real parallel. The artistic argument is one which cannot be applied to any blood sport in which animals suffer and are killed;

but the Anglo-Saxon temperament can understand and approve of killing and inflicting pain in the name of "sport" and "healthy exercise," while it is quite incapable of admitting the same thing on the justification of art or scientific research.

There is one other thing which I think worth repeating. Matadors are also wounded and killed—very frequently. Here is the story of a bull named Bailador, as it is told by Antonio García Poblaciones, a friend of Gallito:

Bailador took four pics and killed four horses, and it was still very difficult when it passed to the quarter of the banderillas. Gallito had worked very hard on this bull, and his sash was slipping, but so as to waste no time in coming out for his faena he tore it off instead of adjusting it. Bailador had planted itself by the barrera, and Gallito went after it and managed to draw it towards the centre of the arena, but without making it charge frankly for the muleta. This faena was with the right hand. The bull went back again to the barrera, and Gallito tried again to draw it out, but he was still unable to make it take the cloth so that he could control and dominate it. The bull was also suffering from some congestion and was bleeding from the eyes, so that it could not see well at close quarters; and Gallito, who had observed this, drew back to let himself be seen. As he was changing the muleta from one hand to the other, the bull suddenly charged and caught him, giving him its horns twice while he was in the air and also giving him a tremendous blow with its forehead. Gallito tried to get up, but he was unable to. Everyone rushed to the *quite*, and they brought him out of the arena. He only had enough breath to cry out twice, "Tell Mascarell!" He was

INTRODUCTION

taken to the infirmary, where it was seen that his injuries must be fatal. The following official bulletin was issued:

"During the fight with the fifth bull, José Gómez, Gallito, was admitted to the infirmary suffering from a deep wound in the abdomen and right inguinal region, with extrusion of the omentum, intestine, and bladder, great traumatic shock, and probable internal hæmorrhage, and another wound in the upper part of the right thigh. The first injury is extremely grave; on the second, diagnosis is reserved.

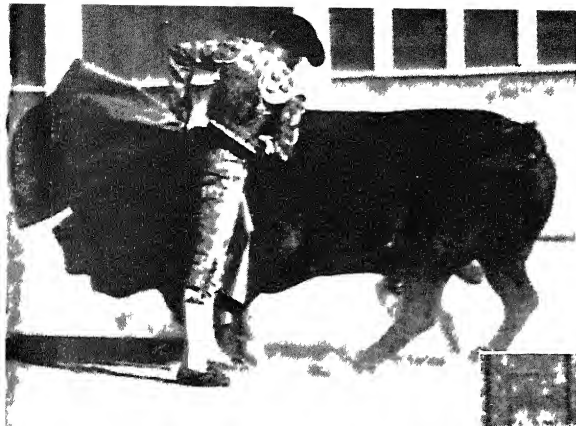
—Dr Francisco Luque."

Mejias quickly killed the bull, and when he had finished with the sixth he ran to the infirmary, where he found Gallito dying. When Gallito was brought in he was in a state of collapse, and the doctors had tried to revive him with injections, but their efforts were useless. He died in a few minutes.

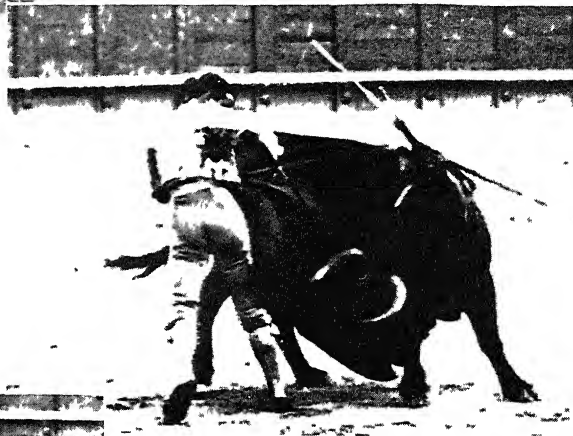
Who was this José Gómez, Gallito? There is quite a lot of him in this book. He is spoken of as Joselito, and he fought beside Belmonte in nearly two hundred corridas.

Belmonte himself has been wounded more times than I could easily count. So far he has not been killed; now they say he has retired, but he has retired several times before, and I don't think he himself has ever believed too seriously in his own retirements. So tomorrow he may come out to fight again, and tomorrow may be the afternoon that destiny has marked down for a bull to get him. No bullfighter ever knows.

This book is the story of the life of a bullfighter as Belmonte lived it, set down with the queer mixture of modesty and pride and simplicity which is a part of the man, without any of the pageantry



Belmonte's *pase ayudado*, that is, aided with the sword, also called the *pase de castigo*.

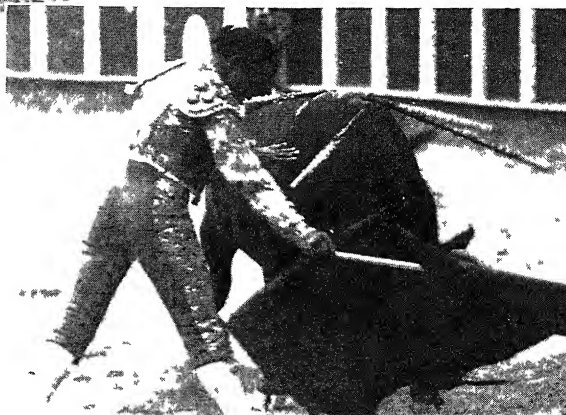


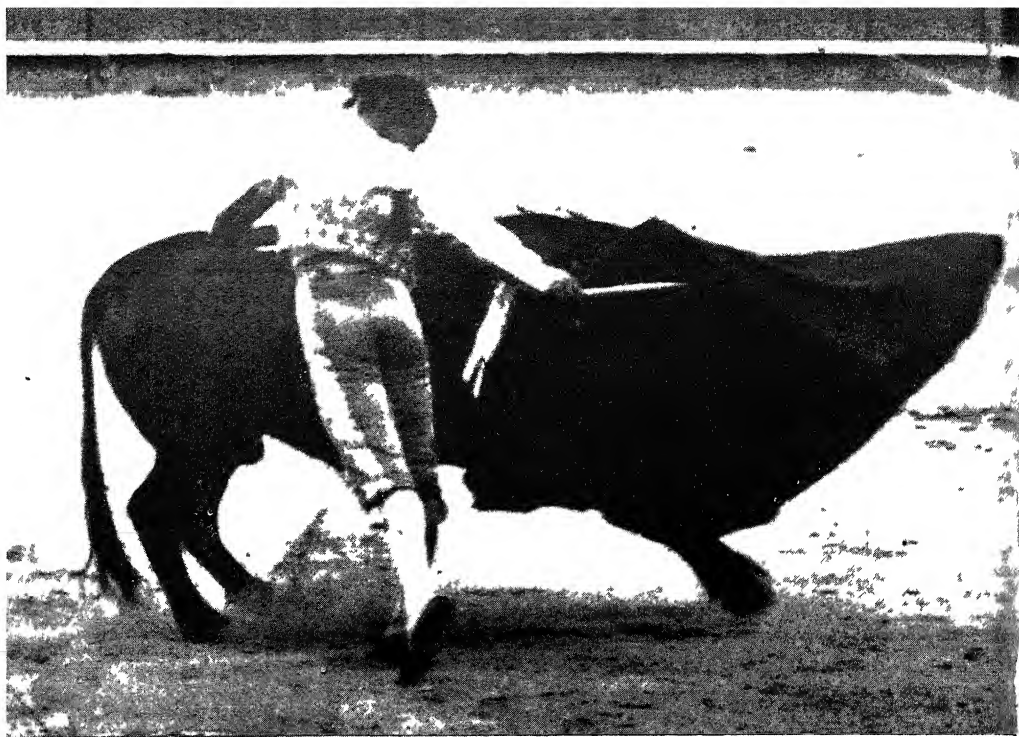
Another glimpse of Belmonte's characteristic *media verónica*.



Belmonte in a *pase natural*.

Belmonte in a *pase de pecho*.





Belmonte in another *natural*. Note how his left hand touches the bull throughout the pass.

A *natural* with the left hand.



and operatics in which bullfighting has been dressed up for popular consumption by imaginative composers and film producers. It takes you behind the scenes of bullfighting and shows you how a man becomes a bullfighter, which is a point that the imaginative costumiers have always curiously overlooked; it gives you some idea of why a man becomes a bullfighter, and what goes on in his mind, and what is that strange fascination which takes him back again and again to the arena to risk wounds that may mean weeks of agony if not torturing death, more torturing than any bull ever suffered in the ring, for the art in which he believes; and even if there were no bullfighting in it I think that this autobiography would still be worth reading, for the story of a man's life from poverty to triumph. It is the story of a man who, against every conceivable obstacle, has achieved what he set out to achieve, whether you think that the achievement was worth the effort or not. And if you want to be fair, before you let any prejudices decide what the achievement is worth, you might legitimately ask yourself: If bullfighting is merely the exhibition of brutality that some people believe, would it draw a public of tens of thousands, men and women, of all classes and occupations and degrees of education, from all parts of Spain, on every day of the season? Because if that is so, the incidence of sadism in Spain must amount to a percentage that would fascinate a psychopathologist—and yet Spain has never needed any societies for the prevention of cruelty to children. And is it plausible that a mere exhibition of brutality could gather around it and support the literature, the writers and artists and critics, the books and periodicals devoted exclusively to tauromachy, that bullfighting can claim? And you might ask yourself, Is it convincing to rate a thing for which men suffer wound after wound, for which many of them die every year, in the same category as the perverse-

INTRODUCTION

ness of a small boy pulling the wings off flies on a window pane? Commercialism? It was not commercialism that took Juan Belmonte out to the pastures of Tablada, night after night, as a boy, to risk wounding and death in order to satisfy the passion that he had for playing bulls. It was not commercialism that made him neglect his own job, when he had one, and forget all about the family which he should have been helping to support, when bull-fighting seemed to offer him no hope of ever providing him with a living—simply to practise the art which to him was the only thing worth doing in the world. It was not commercialism which has brought him out again and again, during these later years and during his periods of retirement, to fight in charity corridas and risk the same wounds and death. It was not commercialism which has brought him out again and again from his retirements, in these later years when he is a wealthy man who could live the rest of his days in luxury without ever risking another goring. It is not commercialism, it is not cruelty, it cannot be the desire to win more vulgar applause, when this man's fame is as great in his own country as any man's fame could ever be. You can only believe what he himself says, that he does it because he cannot help himself, because the inspiration is greater than himself, because this is the faith in which he believes and to which he has dedicated the genius which was given to him; and whether you approve or not you must respect his sincerity.

Who is this Juan Belmonte, whose fame is great enough to have spread beyond the frontiers of his own country to places where bullfights are never seen and his art is not even appreciated or understood? I remember him as I last saw him during the Feria of Sevilla in 1936, when we were having a drink together in the Andalucía Palace. He is not a young man, filled with any rash

ambitions and vainglorious bravado: he is forty-four now, and his face is full of lines. He is so ugly that a photograph can hardly help flattering him, with a long eagle's nose and a great wide mouth and a chin that sticks out like the prow of a ship. He stammers when he speaks, especially when he is with strangers, or when he is excited; and partly for this reason, and partly because of the almost terrified shyness which he has never overcome, he avoids meeting new people. In spite of all his success in the arena, he has an inferiority complex which will only let him be really happy when he is with friends with whom he can relax and feel at ease. He is short and thin and stoop-shouldered; usually he looks almost like a sick man. He is a sick man. He has never been really strong, never been really healthy, in all his life; all his vitality is in his eyes, brilliant black piercing eagle's eyes which with that amazing chin express the quality of that heroic force of will which has whipped so many miracles out of his feeble body. But then, as he says himself, bullfighting is a spiritual and not a physical exercise; and it may be that the physical weakness of Belmonte has contributed to much of the greatness of his work. Because Belmonte has never been physically capable of running away from a bull; he was never strong enough to jump over the barrera, he could never have made any great physical effort to save himself from danger. When he fights, he walks slowly out towards the bull, and then he must defeat the bull, he must control and dominate it, he must master it completely by nothing but the spiritual power which guides the cloth in his hands with such uncanny perfection, until he can turn his back and walk slowly away. It is the only way he can fight, and in doing it he achieves the ideal of bullfighting which every other matador has attempted in vain. If, without ever having heard of Belmonte, you were told that a man who was practically a cripple,

INTRODUCTION

who was certainly a physical wreck, could become the greatest bullfighter in the world, would you not say that if he did it he would be performing a miracle? But this is only what Juan Belmonte has done.

And at the same time I remember that we were not talking about bullfighting that afternoon. We talked about books—his youthful devotion to stories of adventure is still undimmed—and we talked about more serious books, and from there we went on to more serious subjects, and we talked about international politics, and the future of Spain, and the future of the world, and solved all the world's problems and put the world right in an hour or two, as one does in these arguments; and through it all, though he still speaks with the accent and dialect of Andalucía, you could see the working of a clear and keen and delicate mind, a mind that had read and studied and thought, a mind with as pleasant and fine a culture as I have ever known. This also is Juan Belmonte, the gutter-snipe who only went to school for four years. But this is only an infinitesimal part of his greatness. His greatness is when he wears the *traje de luces*, the dress of lights, and goes out into the afternoon sunlight to tantalise death with his marvellous cape or his inspired muleta. And then Juan Belmonte—as "Don Modesto" wrote—"Belmonte, who is so ugly, so weak, so insignificant, in these supreme moments of the fight is transfigured until he touches a quality of greater beauty than the imagination of Fidiás Praxiteles could have conceived."

LESLIE CHARTERIS.

Part One:

THE BEGINNING

THE BEGINNING

I

I BELIEVE that the earliest thing I can remember is the death of El Espartero. It happened when I was only a little more than two years old. Whether this is a genuine case of precocious memory, or whether I heard it related so often afterwards that in the end I honestly believed that I remembered it, the recollection is still so clear and vivid that I myself cannot question it.

I was riding on the coachman's box of a carriage, which my family had probably hired for a Sunday afternoon drive. Someone rushed up as the carriage stopped at the door of a house.

"Don't you know?" he blurted out. "A bull has gored El Espartero and killed him!"

Everyone tumbled out of the carriage to ask for details, and I was left alone on the box. Perhaps that was when what little intelligence I had at the time framed its first question. What had happened? "A bull has killed El Espartero! . . . A bull has killed El Espartero!" I heard it repeated over and over again. I didn't understand. I didn't know then what a bull was, or who was El Espartero, or what was death. But those words, and the startling effect of them, above all because of the way in which they suddenly took everyone away from me and left me so suddenly alone and frightened without understanding why, are indelibly graven on my memory.

And then, after this, my memory may have been carved deeper

by the pomp and ceremony with which in those days Sevilla used to honour the death of a great *torero*. After the funeral processions they composed sad little songs in tango rhythm to recall him:

*Four horses used to draw
The coach of El Espartero . . .**

And mournful *pasodobles*:

*Manuel García, El Espartero,
He who was king
Of all toreros . . .*

My whole infancy was coloured by this popular glorification of the heroic death of the *torero*. It was the most important happening of my childhood. Years after, when I understood it all, groups of little girls who gathered in the small squares at dusk would still sing about that glorious death.

Was this a coincidence or an omen, the finger of destiny or one of those childhood influences from which the psychoanalysts say that a man's later life is moulded? It is beyond my own power to judge. I only know that this was the starting point of my conscious life, something like a flash of lightning which first split the empty darkness of my mind, and that since then these things have been the most enduringly passionate absorption of my life. And as they were the beginning, for all I know, they may just as easily be the end.

* Nearly all bullfighters have nicknames, which may easily be much better known than their real ones. *El Espartero* means the mat-maker. Bullfighters, as everyone should know by now, are *toreros*: a "toreador" is something in an opera.

A little later my family went to live in the Calle Roelas, a narrow lane at the back of the street called Hombre de Piedra. The wall of the convent of Santa Clara ran the length of this alley, and the kids of the district used to make a great game of clambering over the wall and showing themselves at the convent windows, where they would bawl shrill insults at the scandalised nuns and rush away shrieking with delight. Naturally I was one of them.

One night a man hanged himself on this wall, and when they found him in the morning he was a messy sight. The birds had found him first. Someone painted a big cross with red ochre on the part of the wall where the poor devil had dangled with his tongue protruding through his blue lips, and from that time all of us were convinced that the place was haunted. Not one of our gang dared to pass it at night: for us, that great red cross painted on the wall held all the terrors of the Unknown.

Many evenings when it was getting dark I used to find myself at the other end of the street, and to avoid passing the dreaded spot I had to go all the way round the block. Sometimes I would stand on the corner with my feet rooted to the ground, looking at the cross in the distance illuminated by the dismal glimmer of a street lamp. Suppose I dared? What would happen to me?

One night I dared.

I started off with my heart in my mouth and my teeth clenched to keep it in. I walked past the cross. My footsteps rang out like thunderclaps in that narrow and deserted street. I have never felt more of a man. Grimly, with my fists clenched and buried deep in my pockets, my eyes glued to the great red cross, I passed close

to it and defied it. When I got to the other side I drew a breath that would have filled a balloon, and I had a delirious sensation of self-confidence that almost suffocated me.

I had performed my first heroic deed. It may seem absurd, but I have never felt so happy and so proud of myself as I did that night.

3

I was always getting into trouble. My excursions reached as far afield as the Alameda, which was the meeting-place of all the good-for-nothings of the district. At the end of the Alameda there was a pavilion called the Recreo which stood somewhat higher than the ground around it. A ramp with a wall on either side ran up to the entrance, and the walls were artistically crowned by two bronze sphinxes which the people of Sevilla called "the sirens"—nobody knows why. The favourite game of the boys who hung around the Alameda was to climb on to the wall and walk along the edge until they reached the sirens, which were at some considerable height. The supreme feat was to mount the crupper of the siren and embrace it from behind so that your hands reached its cold hard breasts.

One afternoon, when I was trying to get my short arms around the big bronze torso of the siren, I fell and cut my head open. They took me to the hospital in the Plaza de San Lorenzo. I was streaming with blood. There was a fat assistant sitting out in the square, and with great tranquillity he gathered up his chair, his panama hat, and his newspaper, and prepared to attend to me.

"It's going to hurt you a lot, youngster," he said, in such a simple and natural way that he calmed me completely. "Let's see if you can take it."

With his great fleshy fingers he proceeded to bathe my head and sew up the wound, without getting a whimper out of me. It was my first experience of torn flesh, of physical anguish, of gauze and bandages; and the truth is that I didn't find it too disagreeable. I can still remember that painful treatment with great complacency, the imperturbability of the assistant, and the softness of the evening in the Plaza de San Lorenzo as I met it when I came out of the hospital with my head bound up.

When I got home I was more sorry for myself and a good deal uglier.

"This child is getting more incorrigible every day"—I had already heard the refrain so often that it was becoming an obsession.

4

They sent me to school as a punishment. It really was a punishment, that dismal barrack of a building, the damp and gloomy rooms, and the bad-tempered masters, whom we could never credit with any human feeling. It was said that the school building had once been one of the prisons of the Inquisition, and it was whispered among the boys that they still kept the inquisitors' instruments of torture in the cellars. It gave the school a very sinister atmosphere. We were all afraid of it, and when we passed through the great sombre portals we felt as though we were passing into the darkest caverns of the Styx. Towards the schoolmaster we were as hostile and desperate as a cage of tigers. Only the real fear of a thrashing, and the vague terror of I don't know what fearful tortures of the Inquisition which our imaginations conjured up, kept us pinned

down on the hard benches in a more or less orderly manner. But there was one occasion when we thought that the teacher was smacking a boy with too much enthusiasm. We shied an ink-pot at his head and ran away.

I was only at school from the age of four until I was eight years old. They taught me to read and write—very painfully, I'm sure, but very conscientiously. That was all my academic education.

5

At that time we moved to Triana, a suburb of Sevilla, where we settled into a lodging house in the Calle Castilla. My mother died there.

I remember no more of her than that she was very young and very pretty. When she died, the women put a shroud on her and loosened her braids, spreading her great length of hair over the pillow. I remember how beautiful her face was that day, and the black hair spread out over her peaked shoulders and sunken breast. They put her bed next to a window which opened on to a corridor, and all morning the neighbours filed past and wept for her. They must have mourned her very much: she was so young and pretty. The women of the neighbourhood stopped their work and trooped along with their sleeves rolled up and their brats dragging along behind to stand in front of our window and look at my dead mother, to mourn for her and admire her beautiful hair. From the corner of the patio where I had been told to stay, I saw the women pass me sadly and come back sobbing. Nobody took any notice of me. When, little by little, I crept up closer, a relative or a neighbour would push me gently away and say: "Go on,

Juan. Run along down the street and play with the children."

In the evening, when it was time to bury her, they put a black bib on me and sent me out in the street to play. One or two mothers sent their children to play ball with me. While I was playing with them, I was still furtively watching the preparations for the burial, the coming and going of friends and relations, the hushed and reverent passing back and forth. As the evening drew on a great sadness took possession of me. I was there playing with my friends as if nothing had happened, but deep inside me had been born a bitterness and desolation such as I had never felt before. It was a feeling of loneliness, of emptiness, of being nothing. No one paid any attention to me. "Go and play with the children," they said; and I was playing with them resignedly, playing without really knowing what I was doing, while they were taking away my dead mother, without being able to rid my mind of that resentment against the loneliness in which they had left me, that voiceless and pent-up grief of a child who understands and doesn't want anyone to know, that bitterness of being ignored, of being allowed no part in the burial which I somehow knew must affect me more deeply than any other I should ever see. And with this tumult of emotions throbbing in my mind, I played ball and amused myself until it was night and my father came to take me home.

Like most boys whose mothers die when they are young, I grew up long before my time. They stopped sending me to school and put me in the oddments shop to help my father. When my grandfather's estate was divided up, an uncle of mine finally took over

the establishment in the Calle de la Feria and my father opened a little shop on his own account in a corner of the Triana market. It was a shop which we had to put together every day at dawn, setting it up in the street with planks and trestles and boxes of merchandise. On Thursdays we took it to pieces and moved it over in a hand barrow to the Calle de la Feria. Another uncle of mine who was about the same age as I was helped to push the barrow. On the downward slopes we would fit the wheels into the tram-lines and go careering away at breakneck speed, having the time of our lives. But the thing which I dreaded most of all was to be left in charge of the stand.

When my father went off to have a drink at the tavern on the corner and left me to look after the stall, he would give me instructions.

"Keep your mind on your selling. Let 'em haggle, but don't let 'em have their own way. Don't let 'em pass off any dud coins on you. And whatever you do, keep your eyes skinned for the Algabianians!"

The women of La Algaba had a great reputation as shoplifters in the markets. I don't know whether they deserved it or not, but they were credited with an extraordinary dexterity at pinching the wares of slow-witted shopkeepers. Whenever my father left me alone with the stall, I could think of nothing else but the looting hands of those Algabianians. As soon as a woman whose accent or bearing seemed the least bit Algabianian came towards the stall, my sufferings began. The woman would hardly have said good morning to me when I would be in agony wondering whether she had already grabbed something. For what my father didn't know, and didn't even suspect, was that anyone could have robbed me with impunity, without any sleight of hand, for the simple reason

that I didn't feel myself capable of accusing anyone, even if they had knocked something off under my very nose. At that age I had a timidity that was almost pathological. I was sure of nothing: for me, the world was full of surprises and confusion, and I could draw no firm lines between fantasy and reality. I had so little faith in my own senses that if I had seen anyone rob me I wouldn't have dared to make sure of it for fear that I might be mistaken. Suppose I accused a woman of stealing and found that I was mistaken? And suppose it was true and I couldn't prove it? I should have died of shame and remorse. No; by all means the Algabanians could come and pick anything off the stall that they fancied. It was lucky that they didn't know what a sad state of mind I was in. Thanks to that, my father escaped premature ruin.

What they did guess was my inability to stand up to haggling, and they were quick to take advantage of it. It seemed as if they deliberately waited to catch me alone at the stall before they came up to make a purchase. At the start of the battle I would stand out heroically for the price marked; but the more crafty ones kept on arguing, and step by step they would lure me into the net of their reasonings, their wheedlings, their fencing and flattery, until I was ashamed of being so obstinate. I would flush as red as a tomato and completely forget the elementary precaution of watching their hands. Instead of that, I would gaze into their eyes as if I was mutely imploring them to take pity on my helpless timidity; and I would always end up by accepting whatever coins they chose to be kind enough to press into my hand, without counting them or even looking at them—I hated so much to have to argue and haggle with those women whose eyes, even those of the old ones, made me feel uncomfortable and overawed. Motherless myself, I was not used to dealing with women, and I was terrified when they came near me.

Sometimes my father would return from the tavern at the very moment when they had got the better of me and some woman actually had her purchase in her hands.

"How much did you get for that?" he would ask.

"So and so," I would confess, going pink in the face and wishing that the earth would swallow me up.

My father would let out a piercing howl and tear the packet out of the woman's hands. He would throw the money in her face and begin to revile her in the most frightful vocabulary I had ever heard.

"Thief! Sow! Do you have to swindle babies? Get out of here before I drag you out by your hair. You filthy old hag!"—and a stream of other epithets which are quite unprintable.

I could have died of shame.

My father had a technique of salesmanship which was entirely his own: it consisted in establishing a savage state of war with every customer. When the village matrons came to our oddments stall, my father sold them his odds and ends with a running fire of insults and vilifications phrased in the most violent language. They were not much less sharp with their tongues than he was, so that our honourable business proceeded to the accompaniment of an interminable litany of oaths and abuse. I could never get used to those tactics. To this day I don't know why the customers put up with it; but everyone said that my father was a wonderful salesman.

We used to close the stall early, and my father would go off to a café. Often he would take me by the hand and let me trot along

with him. We would go to the Calle Sierpes and saunter slowly along it, stopping every few minutes at one of the groups which gathered at the doors of cafés and saloons. At that time the whole life of Sevilla could be seen unfolding itself in that street. The more or less moneyed gentry would be lounging against the doors of the casinos having their shoes shined while others less fortunate approached them for references and introductions. Outside the Liberal Club there were always groups of sycophants waiting for Don Pedro la Borbolla; at the marble tables of the Café Central ranchers and business men closed their deals, and bullfighters signed their contracts; at the Café Nacional you found government officials and money-lenders, municipal employees and vestrymen; and in the middle of the street, grain merchants with specimens wrapped up in bits of old newspaper would discuss prices for hours on end, and men in the olive-oil business would be holding their tubes of samples up to the light; all this in the midst of a swirling crowd of shrimp-pedlars, bootblacks, and vendors of lottery tickets.

My father usually went to the Café América and the Café Madrid. The latter had a broad cool patio at the back with huge billiard tables, where they played the games that were popular at the time—"Fortyone," "Round the World," and "Match." My father was a great performer in these tournaments.

When we arrived at the café he would stand there for a while watching the game, and then, when he liked the look of a party, he would ask if he could join in. This was a right which everybody had, and nobody could be refused. He would collect a cue (his own private cue which he kept there) and calmly proceed to play, with great firmness and gravity. He played well—so well that very often the mere sight of him would break up a party. They were

very formal parties, and they took their game seriously. Not for them were the small tables and the games which consisted entirely of cannons: they played on big tables with pockets and skittles—a sort of skittle pool. The players were mostly ripe and natty gents, *flamencos*. They played with much style and many majestic flourishes, with their hats tilted on to the back of their heads and their curled forelocks tumbling over their temples and a toothpick drooping out of their mouths. Some of them still wore bowler hats of old-fashioned architecture, the old tight trousers tucked into the tops of their boots, and gold watch-chains big enough to anchor a battleship.

While my father was playing, I would spend my time foraging around the café, eating any lumps of sugar I could find on the tables and drinking with great relish the tiny glasses of milk and *licor de rosa* which in those days the café used to stand its clients. Whenever my father won a match—in the argot they used to call it a war—he would give me a penny, and I would set off for the Swiss pastrycook's next door like a shot out of a gun. On the days when my father's luck was in I ended up with indigestion.

I went to the café with my father from the time I was eight until I was eleven. It taught me several fundamental things; among them, to know how a man with self-esteem should behave. While my father's friends were chattering, I was sitting beside them, silent and unnoticed, learning my lesson of manhood. I would strain my ears to hear how these parties of men spoke about women, and I was becoming familiar with the idea that a woman was an unimportant but agreeable creature, to be hunted cunningly and depreciated afterwards. I could already gauge the value which a man placed on his word, and knew in what circumstances it was permissible for him to break it. I had learned all

these sophisticated casuistries in the Café Madrid when I was scarcely eleven years old. The café is a pretty good school of manners.

But as I grew older my father began to put me on one side. When I was eleven he stopped taking me to the café. I didn't interest him any more. Instead of me, he took my brother Manolo. The same thing happened with all his sons. When they grew older he didn't want any more to do with them.

The shop would be closed in the evening, my father would go off to the café to play his games of billiards, and I would find myself in the Altozano, where we were living then, without knowing what to do or where to go. I had no friends of my own age. I was a brat whose mind had grown up lop-sidedly in the atmosphere of the café, without any of the moderating influence which school friends might have given me. My brother Manolo was so small that he was no use except to take the part of the bull when we played at bullfighting. The Plaza del Altozano was frequented by many budding bullfighters, and I used to play at bullfighting there without any idea of making it my profession. It would be untrue to say that I had thought of that yet. I simply played at bullfighting because it was the natural thing for me to do: in those days all the boys of my age did it, just as to-day they are always playing football. Another of my childish pastimes, and the one whose fascination has clung to me longer than any other, was that of tilting at bulls. Armed with one of the poles that supported the awning over the stall, I would charge down upon the wretched dogs of the neighbourhood and bowl them over with a good deal of dexterity. We still play this game in the country, mounted on horseback and using a blunt heavy lance; and to this day I know of no exercise that gives me greater pleasure than to charge down at full gallop on a young

bull and tumble it skilfully over. Even bullfighting is tame in comparison.

When my father gave me the cold shoulder and left me to my own devices I was all at sea. At that time it was the merest chance that I didn't go wrong completely. Triana was full of gangs of unscrupulous gutter-snipes of every kind, and it became my fervent ambition to be accepted into their fraternities. They taught me to smoke, to drink *aguardiente*, to play cards, and to go with women. I was an apt pupil of this Fagin's Academy, and in a few months I knew all the classical tricks of the trade.

But my career as a picaroon, which had begun under such favourable auspices, was suddenly cut short by the comradeship of three new friends.

8

They were three fine lads, very different from the other boys who roamed about Triana. They were compositors by trade, and they had a little printing press in the corner of a shop that sold miscellaneous tools and accessories. Whether it was on account of their job or for some other reason, they were certainly insatiable readers. It was almost a vice with them. They fairly devoured every novelette that they could lay their hands on, and ransacked the town for more.

The friendship of these boys infected me with the same passion, and for many months I did nothing but read with feverish avidity. I gulped down pound after pound of cheap paper-covered fiction, detective stories and yarns of adventure. Sherlock Holmes, Arsène Lupin, and Montbars the Pirate were our paragons. Later on, a publishing house, which if I remember rightly was run by

Blasco Ibáñez, began to bring out some books of more meaty blood-and-thunder, and from week to week we waited on tenter-hooks for the latest developments of the marvellous adventures of our heroes of romance.

The effect which all this reading produced on myself as well as on the other three was so intense that while we were reading one of these novels of adventure we would identify ourselves with the hero to the point where the life we led was more his than our own. We followed the suggestions of the stories with such fervour that one week we were pirates in the Gulf of Maracaibo, the next week we were detectives in Whitechapel, and the week after we were Apaches on the banks of the Seine. But the characters who seized our imagination most strongly were the fearless explorers in the heart of Africa. In the whole world there was nothing that gripped our minds so vividly as the valiant figure of the lion-hunter in the virgin jungles. The classic struggle between man and beast filled us with wild enthusiasm. In certain picture shops in the Calle Regina at that time you could occasionally find chromos depicting scenes of the hunting of wild animals in Africa and India, painted in such brilliant colours that we would stand in front of them for hours and hours, quivering with emotion, and expecting at any moment that the chromo would come to life and the hunting scene which it represented would go on. If this miracle had come to pass, it wouldn't have surprised us in the least. One of the chromos showed a white hunter, with a topee and gleaming boots, kneeling on the ground with his rifle steadily aimed at a ferocious tiger which was driving its claws into the naked breast of a negro. That imperturbable hunter was our idol, the epitome of all that we would have liked to be, our demigod.

As we went on talking and talking about the hunting of lions in

darkest Africa, we began to aspire in a confused sort of way to become lion-hunters ourselves. And we did. What should one do, we would ask each other in our discussions, if both barrels missed fire and the lion was advancing hungrily towards one? Is it wise to get down from the back of an elephant in order to help a negro slave who has been caught unawares by the sudden attack of a wild animal? Naturally, the lion would always die and the negro would be saved.

There came a time when the reality of our hunts became far more powerful than the impossibility of finding lions in the vicinity of Triana; and since much greater difficulties had already been overcome in our imagination, we thought that to go and look for them would be comparatively easy. So we solemnly decided to go to Africa and hunt lions.

The preparations for the expedition were very laborious. At the start, all four of us had the same enthusiasm; but as the details were realised more clearly we began to hesitate and disagree.

The first difficulty was finance. We needed a lot of money to equip ourselves, to buy the goodwill of the savage tribes who were to provide us with guides—those unfortunate negroes who from time to time would have to be eaten by lions—and to pay for the fitting out of our safari. And before everything else, we should have to charter a ship. How much money did it cost to charter a ship? The enterprise was too big for our imagination, and we were on the point of surrendering—not for lack of money, but for lack of fantasy, which is the only reason why one ever does surrender.

When the three brothers' spirits failed before the hopelessness of collecting enough money out of our paltry savings to buy a suitable ship, and all seemed to be lost, I took a heroic decision.

"We're going," I said, "to the heart of Africa to meet countless dangers. Every day we shall face greater struggles and more pressing needs than that of the boat, and we shall have to overcome them as best we can. Why should we be stopped by not having enough money to buy a boat? If we can't afford to buy it, we'll steal it."

My daring inspiration filled the three brothers with enthusiasm. The following morning the four of us strolled along the waterfront with our hands in our pockets, eyeing the brigantines which brought cargoes of fish from Denmark to the Guadalquivir. From the wharf I studied the decks of the ships where sleepy and slow-moving sailors were mending the sails, frying their slices of mackerel, or playing carelessly with the ship's puppy. It looked to me like the simplest thing in the world to take them by surprise, throw them overboard, weigh anchor, and sail away down the river. My comrades had some doubts about the success of the plan, but I had none. One of them had a moment of clairvoyance and left us, telling us that we had gone daft. We treated his cowardice with the contempt which it deserved. We would heave the Danish sailors over the side and pinch the boat. That was that.

With this decided, we set ourselves to solve the remaining difficulties. To collect money, we agreed that we would each put from one to two *reales** into a common fund from which we would buy the necessary arms and ammunition. Some weeks of saving, assisted by small domestic pilferings, brought us enough wealth to go to the Thursday market and buy two pistol barrels without stocks or triggers, and an old musket which was so useless that the hawker had no qualms about putting it into our childish hands. But

* A *real* is 25 céntimos; 4 *reales* make a peseta; 5 pesetas are a *duro*; and before the Civil War pesetas went about 36 to the pound or 7.50 to the dollar.

our efforts to save progressed slower than our imaginations, and we soon realised that it would take many years to collect enough money to equip ourselves as self-respecting explorers ought to be equipped.

And then came more open disagreements. Some thought that the expedition ought to be postponed indefinitely; others that we ought to set out at once. What difference did it make whether we had a ship full of supplies or not, when the first flip of a whale's tail might shipwreck us and land us up on a desert island where we should have to collect everything all over again? No expedition could cave in for such an insignificant accident as that; so why shouldn't we pretend that we had once had all the supplies we wanted, and go on as if we had just lost them in the shipwreck? This suggestion did not convince everybody. Another of the brothers turned coward and deserted, and in the end I was left with the only one of the three whose faith was still unshaken. He, like myself, was resolved to conquer or die. We shook hands solemnly, like the two grown men we were, and swore to go to savage Africa and hunt lions together, alone or accompanied, with or without money, on ship or on foot, with weapons or without them.

In four or five nocturnal and secret conferences we came to an agreement. We would wait no longer. We would do without a ship of our own, and go on foot to Cádiz. There we would look out for the first boat that was setting sail for the coast of Africa, and contrive to stow away on it. We would arrange the other details when we had got over the Straits of Gibraltar.

All the same, it wouldn't do us any harm to have a little money. I opened the till of the oddments stall and pocketed a few pesetas. When I got home one night, my father, who cannot have been very

pleased with my behaviour, gave me a good hiding for some good reason which I can't remember now; and that finally settled the course which it seemed my life would have to take. I stole my father's watch and pawned it; and that same evening at dusk the compositor and I set out from Triana, prepared to leave Africa completely denuded of lions.

We went out into the wide world with a thrill of happiness that I cannot describe. Out on the Dos Hermanos road we walked, out on the highway to Cádiz; and every time we turned our heads and saw the silhouette of the Giralda fading further and further away into the twilight, it seemed as if there were wings on our heels, and that that old and wasted life of the city which the shades of night were swallowing up would change in the twinkling of an eye to a marvellous world populated with glistening negroes, gigantic elephants, raging lions, crocodiles, eagles, cannibal villages, prodigious jungles, and rivers furrowed by swift canoes. The nodding heads of the eucalyptus trees along the roadside whispered in tune with our imaginations. When Sevilla could no longer be seen, we had one moment of remorse. We said nothing, but quickened our steps. After the night had closed down on us, we still marched on—one hour, two, three . . . It began to get cold. The country seemed very big and very lonely. We stopped in front of an inn, without daring to enter; and a half-drawn curtain revealed the friendly glow of an oil-lamp which gave me my first sensation of homesickness.

It must have been in the small hours of the morning when we agreed to call a halt and rest until the following day. But where were we going to sleep? We couldn't approach any inhabited spot for fear of being discovered; but it seemed equally unwise to lie down on the ground to sleep. For all we knew, that country might have

been teeming with poisonous snakes.

We were at a level crossing. There were some piles of sleepers beside the road, and we decided to climb to the top of one of them and doze there until it was light. This we did. I made myself as comfortable as I could on one of the ties and tried in vain to sleep. I had seen some big birds flying over our heads and perching on the telegraph poles. Were they ravens? Were they trailing us? For as everybody knows, the ravens are given to pecking out the eyes of young lion-hunters who sleep unwarily on the road.

I didn't sleep a wink. With my face turned up to the starry sky and my back aching as if I was crucified to the hard wood, my legs pinched by the cold and my frightened eyes wide open, I watched the stars fade and the velvet canopy of the night turn pale and become stained with milky streaks that were presently rinsed away by the dawn. The dawn also rinsed our swollen faces with its cold drops of dew. Numb and shivering, we scrambled down the stack of sleepers and set out to walk with the wet grass bathing our bare legs.

The sun came up and began to pour down on our shoulders like molten lead. The inclemency of the sun took the place of the inclemency of the frost, so that our small bodies had no respite from their suffering. Then came hunger, and the scorching agonies of thirst. Dark clouds swam before our eyes, and we threw ourselves down exhaustedly at the side of the road. We lay panting, utterly done in, unable to understand why the world was so inhospitable, so hard and merciless. What dismayed us most was that impassivity of the universe, that sublime indifference of the elements, the sun and dust and cold which cared nothing about our puny existence and yet succeeded in making it unbearable. I would much rather have given battle to a whole pride of lions than

have gone on dragging myself like an ant over that unending bleached ribbon of road.

My comrade and I looked at each other and said nothing. We struggled on manfully; but at the same time a new conception of things was beginning to convince us that we should never get anywhere, that the world was nothing like we had imagined it, and that the best thing we could do would be to go home. We kept our mouths shut and went on. At twilight we reached Alcantarillas. We were afraid to sleep another night in the open air and took refuge in a stable.

It was night when we arrived. When we got into that warm shelter and felt the caress of the thick and suffocating fog on our faces, we threw ourselves down on the evil-smelling straw and gazed at each other speechlessly. There was a strong and pleasant odour of manure, and from time to time the animals moved heavily and threatened to flatten us under their heavy hooves. Soon enough swarms of fleas arrived to make our lives more miserable; and yet we were so hungry for warmth and shelter that we slept like logs. Even the neighing and stamping of our bedfellows failed to wake us until it was daylight.

In the morning we tramped along the railroad tracks. A goods train came by, and we managed to board it; it took us as far as Lebrija. From there we continued on foot towards Jerez. Night overtook us, and we left the road to take a short cut across country through a field of fine bulls. The bushes gave us cover. We were forcing our way painfully through the tall brushwood when the peacefulness of the night was shattered by the bellow of a young bull who stood on a hillock raising his horns to the moon and shouting to the four winds the boast of his youth and power and lust. We flattened ourselves into the scrub and felt him pass close beside

us, lashing his flanks with his tail. It was spring, and all through the pasture we were followed by the majestic roaring of the bulls in rut. I quite forgot that in the Plaza del Altozano I was one of the boys who could give the best and most stylish imitation of a bullfighter. I never believed that I should be capable of standing up to a real bull.

When we got to Jerez we wandered aimlessly about and finally collapsed on the porch of a church among the beggars and cripples who were collecting their tribute from the departing worshippers. Jerez, that beautiful and aristocratic city, with its clean streets, its rich casinos, and its gallant young bloods, saddened us even more, and ended up by demoralising us completely. One of my father's brothers lived in Jerez; and after carefully weighing the pros and cons we went to look for him. This uncle was a humble working-man with six or seven children. He gave us a friendly welcome. While we were twiddling our caps and explaining to him rather bashfully that we were on our way to Africa with certain vague plans that we did not dare to go into too deeply, we became aware of a pungent perfume of boiling cabbage. It was supper-time; and my aunt hospitably invited us to eat some of those beautifully smelling cabbages. I had always hated cabbage, but I pitched into it gluttonously. When we were stuffed they left us to sleep; and the following morning, contrary to my expectations, my uncle cheerfully sent us on our way and wished us good luck in our adventure—either because he had a kindly and compassionate understanding of our romantic spirit or because he didn't want us to go on eating his cabbages with such a ravenous appetite.

We tramped on all day; and late in the afternoon, as we crested a hill, we found ourselves unexpectedly facing the sea, which we

had never seen before. It was a bewildering sight. Since then I have often travelled over the road from Jerez to Cádiz without coming upon the place where the sea met my eyes for the first time. Two years ago, when I was still searching for the exact spot, I came to the conclusion that on that day we must have left the main road, and I turned off along a footpath and found it. I stood there and felt a reawakening of the unspeakable thrill of that spring day when with one glance I discovered the vast panorama of the ocean, and when with my twelve fragile years I was ready to sail out into its unknown horizons with the same faith that must have winged Ulysses himself.

The sea gave us courage, thanks to our resilient optimism and our limitless confidence in our own ability; and we came to Cádiz with our hearts singing. But once again the city crushed us. In Cádiz, as in Jerez, the feeling of impotence returned. We went to the sea wall and gazed despairingly at the sea. For hours and hours we stood silently contemplating the heedless march of the waves.

In the end it was my companion who pathetically voiced the dreaded and yet longed-for suggestion.

"Suppose we went back?"

We held a long and melancholy conversation there in front of the sea, and decided to go home. The world was nothing like the picture we had formed of it in our reading of adventure stories. It was quite different.

But the great consolation of defeat was that now we knew what it was really like. Never again would we deceive ourselves with dreams of raging lions, swift canoes, virgin jungles, and apocalyptic beasts. We had failed to conquer Darkest Africa: we had hunted no lions. But we knew the truth about the world. We had lost our

fear of it. We held its secret. And we would still conquer it. And with this intimate understanding we began our shamefaced retreat to Sevilla.

Curiously enough, I don't remember a single thing about the return journey.

9

We came home with our tails between our legs and had to suffer in silence while our friends and relatives laughed themselves into hysterics at our expense. My father treated the whole thing as a joke, which naturally made me furious. I sulked for days. I would hardly open my mouth at home, even to eat; and in the evenings I would go to loaf about the Altozano, hating everybody and myself most of all.

I amused myself with practising bullfighting, and acquired quite a reputation as a drawing-room torero among the youths who hung around the end of the bridge. I practised my passes on anything that came to hand—dogs, chairs, carriages, or cyclists. I would give a *media verónica* and a *recorte** to a street corner, a parson, or the evening star.

One evening when I was in the Altozano practising on a friend who was taking the part of the bull with great energy and skill, I discovered that some gentlemen were watching me from the parapet of the bridge. Presently one of them called me, and I went proudly up to them with my cap in my hand.

* Even more than the technical terms of most sports, the names of the various passes in bullfighting would be quite meaningless if translated. Some of the more important passes are shown in the illustrations. Anyone who is interested in a fuller description should read Ernest Hemingway's *Death In The Afternoon*.

"Hey, sonny," he said, "where have you fought bulls?"

"Nowhere, sir," I told him.

He took a duro out of his vest pocket and gave it to me.

"Here," he said. "Put this in your money-box. You'll be a real bullfighter some day."

I have often remembered that duro, and wished I knew who the gentleman was.

This first coin that I had ever earned with my cape made me more devoted than ever to my pastime, and I became quite famous among the urchins of Triana; and yet even then it never occurred to me to think that I could do the same things to a real bull that I used to practise on my friends. I never thought that I should be capable of standing up to a real bull. Even now I don't believe it. When I go to the bullring as a spectator and see the bull come out, I always have the same inward conviction that I should never be capable of fighting it.

One day when I was still quite small my family went out for a meal to an inn in La Pañoleta. The inn had a small courtyard where one could fight calves,* and as soon as I knew it I tied a red cloth around my waist and went along with my people with the secret determination to try my hand. It turned out that the becerro was quite unplayable. It kicked, bit, and did everything except hook to the right.† The *aficionados* had long ago given it up as impossible, but the landlord had refused to get rid of it. While my family were eating their

* Bulls are given different names according to their age. A bull of any indeterminate size, but usually a young calf, is a *res*; from one to two years old it is a *becerro*; from two to four years old it is a *novillo*; and only when it is four years old is it considered a *toro*, or full-grown bull.

† A young bull starts off by charging straight ahead; but as it gets older and its horns develop, and it gains experience in sundry battles with its own kind, it may discover the advantages of hooking sideways to the left or right. One of the first things that a bullfighter must learn about a bull which faces him in the ring is whether it hooks to the left or right or ambidextrously. Bulls that hook to the right are the worst, since most passes are made on the right-hand side of the bull.

meal in the sun in front of the inn I went in search of the yard where the becerro was kept, slipped over the wall, got out my red cloth, and tried to induce the animal to charge.*

The pen was hardly nine feet long by a couple of yards wide. I stood at one end with my little cape spread out, and the becerro stood backed up against the other end and looked at me with startled eyes. I cited it again and again without result. Apparently it was quite bewildered by my presence in its lair, and couldn't make up its mind to take my manœuvres seriously. While this was going on my family missed me and began to search for me all over the inn. When they found me I was kneeling in front of the becerro with my cloth spread out under its very nose. Nobody could understand why it hadn't bitten my head off.

10

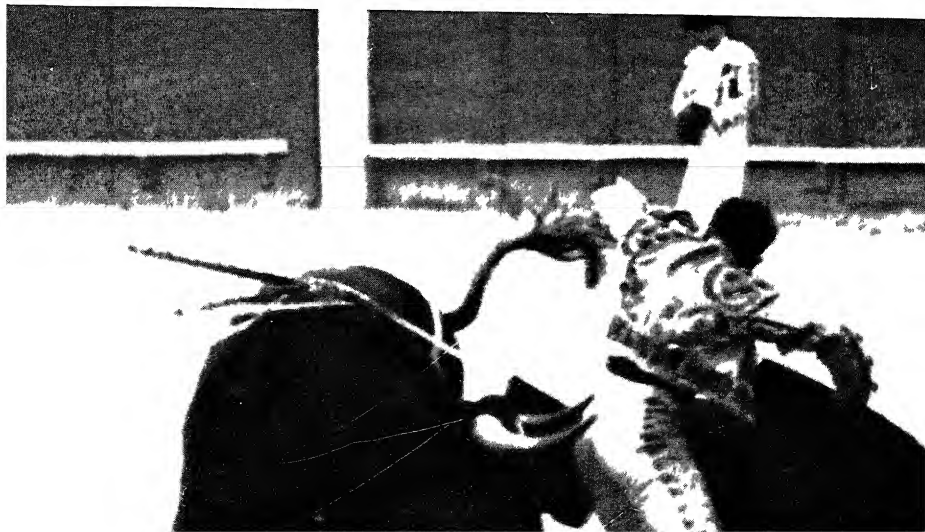
Playing at bullfighting in the Altozano was certainly no serious occupation in life, so my father decided to send me to Huelva, where an uncle of mine had a flourishing business. This was a big shop with several employees and an air of importance which appealed to me in a way that the cheapjack trade of my father's oddments stall had never done. I forgot my adventure stories and my bullfighting and applied myself heart and soul to the job, so that in a few months I was the smartest and most zealous employee

* The word is *citar*, which might be rendered in English as "cite," with this special meaning. The torero takes up his position in front of the bull and standing sideways to it, with his cape spread. He shakes the cape, stamps his feet, and shouts "*¡ju!*" to attract its attention. If he is citing it to the right, his left shoulder is turned towards it, so that the bull will pass him on its right. If he is citing it to the left, the reverse applies.



A *pase de pecho* with the left hand.

Here he is not being caught by the bull, as you might think. He is doing a *molinete*, whirling around right between the horns of the bull.





Here are two of Belmonte's gorings. The upper picture shows what happens if you misjudge your *molinete*.



in the store. My uncle discovered that I had an unusual talent for commerce and was eager to take me under his wing. It was his idea to give me a thorough training and send me out to Buenos Aires so that I could take up the business of another relative of ours who had made his fortune there.

With this in mind, he thought it would be a good idea for me to learn English, and he arranged for me to take lessons from an Englishman who was wandering about Huelva at a loose end. He was a picturesque and amiable character, more interested in what he drank than what he looked like, and a rabid enthusiast about Andalucía and its customs. He came every day to give me an English lesson; but what actually happened was that he spent the time learning slang words and Andalusian expressions and phrases in Romany, which I used to teach him with great glee. When he discovered my passion for bullfighting we gave up everything else. He would put a chair in front of me and make me spend the whole time of the lesson showing him *verónicas* and *recortes*. At other times he would charge me himself, bellowing in a grotesque imitation of a bull. He finished by taking over the cape and performing a series of ridiculous passes which made me double up with laughter. The net result was that the Englishman learned to play bulls and talk slang, and I never learned a single word of English. Whereupon my uncle withdrew his patronage, considering that it was a waste of time to place any more hopes in me.

On top of this he discovered that I was setting a bad example to the other employees. Out of sheer boyish bravado I always used to carry a sharp dagger in the inside pocket of my coat, and the other clerks had even taken to copying me in this. One day one of them got his knife stuck into his own chest when he was jumping over the counter, and nearly killed himself. My uncle

decided that I was a pernicious influence and put me on the train for home. My brilliant future as a captain of industry had melted away.

My father decided that it was time to take me in hand. He had a stout measuring rod with which he took to measuring my ribs the instant I let my attention wander from the work I was doing. One day a friend of his was chatting with him at the stall and fiddling absent-mindedly with the rod when it occurred to him that it was not quite as solid as it ought to have been.

"I tell you what, José," he remarked generously, "I've got a fine mahogany measuring rod that you can have. It's rather heavier than this, but very strong."

I could cheerfully have murdered him.

Since the measuring-rod treatment had become the standard remedy for my shortcomings, a day came when an uncle of mine who was with us in the stall thought it was quite in order to take his cue from my father's methods. I did something that annoyed him, so he grabbed the rod and let me have it. This was more than I felt like standing for. I tore the stick away from him and returned the blow with interest. The blood poured down his face, and I was panic-stricken. I rushed off in search of my father.

"What's the matter?" he demanded, when he saw the state I was in.

"I—I've had a fight with uncle," I stammered breathlessly. "We hit each other with the measuring rod and hurt ourselves."

"Where?"

"In the head," I sobbed.

My father looked almost as scared as I was. He got ho'd of my head and began to feel it all over.

"But *where?*" he insisted anxiously.



Markings of the

*"When they found me I was kneeling in front of the becerro with my cloth
spread out under its very nose."*

J U A N B E L M O N T E

"In—uncle's head," I stammered with pardonable embarrassment.

"Oh, I see," was his only answer.

That solicitude for my head, which I had never suspected, surprised me a good deal. One rarely gives one's father his due.

Part Two

STRUGGLE AND CONQUEST

STRUGGLE AND CONQUEST

I

I DON'T know when it was that I really made up my mind to be a torero. As a matter of fact I already felt like a professional bull-fighter, even if I didn't dare to call myself one. When people are talking about their childhood they are apt to make out that from the time they left their cradles they felt an irresistible urge towards whatever vocation has taken them to success, but I personally must confess that I never succeeded in making a definite decision about my future at any point in my hard-fought apprenticeship. It is true that I had a kind of diffused aspiration towards something which my vacillating temperament could not make up its mind to define. If this ambition was to be a torero, I myself didn't know it. I practised bullfighting, as you might say, "just because"—because I was influenced by my surroundings, because it amused me, because the risk and adventure of that hazardous profession fitted in with my own instinctive leaning towards uncertainty and adventure—because, with the cape in my hands, I, who was such a small and insignificant person with a vast inferiority complex, felt myself so much superior to the other boys who were physically stronger than I. Afterwards I have realised that there must have been some heroic power of will in me which braced me up and kept me thrusting on through all the doubts and false starts and failures of my adolescence. An inexhaustible energy drove me on without telling me where I was going. My ambition was like a bow bent to the horizon with no target in sight.

When I came back from Huelva I plucked up courage to announce that I was going to be a torero, but I was a long way from being sure of it in my own mind. The statement was more than anything else a smoke screen under which I hoped that my fickle caprices would be able to chop and change in peace.

The Plaza de Altozano was the focal point of the bullfighting fraternity of Triana, and its taverns were the meeting-places of all the budding bullfighters of the quarter. Among whom I was not included.

The *aficionados* moved in a strange world to which I could find no admittance. Sevilla is an odd conglomeration of water-tight compartments. There is nothing quite so intimate and cordial as its social relationships; and yet its different families and classes and clubs and cliques and circles are more hermetically sealed than they are anywhere else. In Sevilla the two opposite sides of the street may be as far apart as the poles, and their reception of anyone who tries to cross the gulf will be a good deal colder. Even the gangs of children carry on an endless and savage feud—a war of corner against corner, street against street, and district against district. In La Cava, where we were now living, there were two rival clans, those of the Cava de los Gitanos, and those of the Cava de los Civiles, and the boys of either clan would have stoned the others to death if they had had the chance.

The *aficionados* of the Altozano had no use for me; and though I was just as good an *aficionado* as they were, I had precious little use for them. I belonged to a different community, a crowd of shiftless characters who drifted around the fringe of “official” bullfighting circles, scatter-brained youths who wanted to be toreros without having any fundamental aptitude for the job. From my friendship with the three fantastic composers who took me off

to hunt lions, I fell into the hands of other friends who were even more fantastic, if possible—bullfighters of the craziest species, whose exalted imaginations turned them towards bullfighting as if it were a story-book romance.

One of these weird characters who wanted to be toreros for no sound reason was a certain Abellán, the son of a *carabinero*. He was a consumptive youth with a sickly imagination, the slave of unpleasant vices and diabolical hallucinations. He ended up by writing plays and I believe some of them were produced.

Another of the fraternity was an amusing fellow who was just as much obsessed with the idea of bullfighting. He had never fought a bull and I don't think that in his heart he wanted to; but what he really was obsessed with was the idea of owning a matador's sword. I think this was the only thing that brought him into our company. One day we got hold of a very large antique sabre, which we cut down and converted with the aid of a grindstone into a very passable *estoque*, which the idiot proceeded to cart proudly wherever he went, as if that was all he needed to make him a torero.

Out of the piece of sabre which we had left over we made ourselves a razor with which we attempted to scrape off the fuzz which was beginning to appear on our chins. This was quite a success until we tried to shave an elder brother of the sword-carrier, who already had quite a healthy growth of beard. He didn't seem to enjoy it.

Another of the band was the son of a silversmith in the Plaza del Pan who also wanted to be a torero; and he wound up as a writer like Abellán. His name was Blas Medina. He was the most intelligent and reasonable of the lot, but he had just as little idea of bullfighting.

In fact, we were a troupe of lunatics, a bunch of bright young

know-alls who would certainly have been the laughing-stock of the real *aficionados* if they had ever deigned to notice us.

Blas Medina, the most level-headed of us all, was the one who put the whole essence of the matter into plain language and dragged us out of the world of make-believe in which we were living.

"If we want to be bullfighters," he said, with devastating logic, "the first thing we ought to do is to try ourselves out in front of a bull."

This was sensible enough, but not so easy to put into practice. The only method at our disposal was to pay a visit to the Cara Ancha Inn, where they had a *becerro* that could be hired for five or ten pesetas. I jumped at the idea, and promised to bring my share of the money; but the other *toreros* in our fraternity were quite unable to see any point in spending good pesetas for the pleasure of placing themselves in front of a bull. They were bullfighters by divine inspiration and the grace of God, and they didn't need to be tried out. However, it was finally agreed that each of them should chip in with a peseta, and that one morning we would go and borrow the *becerro*.

When the appointed day came I found that nearly all the others wanted to back out. Only one of them had as much as fifty céntimos and he had no great desire to fight a bull. I was so impatient to see myself in front of a bull that I offered to make up the difference out of my own pocket. The innkeeper insisted that his rock-bottom price was a *duro*. I gave him every penny I had, which made up a little more than four pesetas; and finally he let us into the courtyard and opened the pen.

I wish some journalist had been there to record my first performance. I myself was so excited that I could hardly remember any details afterwards.

I remember the deep impression it made on me to see the animal at such close quarters. It came out of the pen and stood staring at me with its head up. The sight of it fascinated me. I went into the centre of the yard and dropped on one knee, citing it to the right. When it hurled itself towards me I waited steadily for the charge, and just at the right moment I gave it a clean and perfect *cambio de rodillas*. When I realised that that great mass had thundered harmlessly past me, actually brushing my body as it followed the cloth, I was stupefied. The ecstasy of it was almost as much as I could bear. I could hardly believe my eyes. Wild with delight, I ran after it and gave it two or three more passes.

My amazement at finding that the bull really would pass where the cape led it gave way to a feeling of blind confidence. One after another I gave it all the passes which I had been rehearsing for so many years, with as much assurance as if I had been playing with a friend. It was an unforgettable revelation. So one really could do to a bull the same things that one did to chairs and dogs and cyclists!

When the becerro got tired of charging and stood still in front of me with its tongue hanging out, it gave me the impression of being just as astonished as I was. It may be that the clumsy amateurs who had played with it before had never done anything like that to it. I wanted to embrace it and congratulate it on its share in my success.

The bull itself discouraged this sentimental impulse by proceeding to plant itself firmly against the wall, from which it refused to budge any further than was necessary to poke a horn at us when we came too close, as if it was profoundly regretting ever having allowed itself to be played with at all. I let myself be bumped and

prodded over and over again, but I was in such a rapture that nothing it did could hurt me.

When I got home I was worn out but radiant. My recently-acquired stepmother looked at me without approval.

"What are you so excited about?" she inquired grumpily.

I drew myself up.

"I have been getting ready to provide for all these people," I replied, indicating my younger brothers with a magnificent insolence which still makes me blush when I think about it.

2

The inn at Camas also had a courtyard and a becerro; but whereas they used to change the bull at the Cara Ancha when it had been well fought, the one at Camas was a fixture. The landlord had bought it when it was scarcely weaned, and apparently he proposed to exploit it until the time came for it to be yoked to a cart. As the animal grew older and more expert in the art of punishing its opponents it cost less money—and more blood—to fight it. Eventually the landlord was glad to get a peseta for the privilege. We would pool all the money we could rake together and set out to play it.

The bull would emerge from its pen with the weary tread of a slave setting out to win his daily bread, and look at us as if it would like to say: "What? Are you here again? Have you come back for another hiding?"

It would back into a corner and pick its target, and every time it charged one of us would go to the ground. It was so impossible to play it that we went there resigned to the knowledge that we

were going to take a licking. It was just a matter of seeing who would be caught most often. We never managed to give a single successful pass to that wily beast, and all the exercise achieved was to leave us black and blue all over.

You couldn't call it bullfighting. It was simply an unequal and suicidal pitting of our audacity and martyrlike devotion against brute force allied with the most depraved instincts. More expert and more malevolent every time, the bull knew how to bowl us accurately over whenever we were least expecting it; and when it had us on the ground it would trample on us, dribble over us, bite us, and torment us with all manner of indignities.

That helpless writhing on the ground while the hooves of the great black beast kneaded our bodies into the slime was a nightmare that swallowed up all our dreams of glory. As time went on and the bull fed royally on the fodder which our price of admission provided, it went on growing in size and strength, in astuteness and malice. Wiser and warier every day, it made us the victims of absolute refinements of cruelty. It hit us where it knew it would hurt most, and took a fiendish delight in tearing our clothes and rubbing our faces in its dung. It was the Frankenstein's monster of our existence. Its malignity could only be compared with that of the innkeeper, who went on fattening it on our money so that every time we went there it would belabour us more mercilessly.

There were certain ritzy and well-favoured young bullfighters who set out methodically to advance their careers at the regular trials held on the ranches, where they would perform before the

guests of the rancher like students taking an examination. Sometimes you might see them in the Calle Sierpes and the Café Central, looking very haughty and dashing in their well-cut suits, and taking great care to leave the ends of their pigtails visible under their broad-brimmed hats.* I never managed to get in with any of their cliques. I had no sympathy with the "official" bullfighting fraternity, and I left them severely alone. Instead of that, I fell in with a band of youths who used to meet and talk about bulls at a soft-drink kiosk which stood by the wall of the convent of San Jacinto.

I liked bulls and disliked bullfighters. The more enthusiastic I became about bullfighting, the less use I had for the conventional type of young torero. It may have been because my pride was hurt by the insignificant figure I cut among those self-opinionated *aficionados*, who wouldn't even condescend to look at me; or it may have been genuinely caused by a revolutionary conception of the art of bullfighting which forced me to quarrel with all the time-honoured old conventions from the start. Probably in the beginning it was merely indignation, wounded vanity if you like, which drove me away from the accepted standards and the steps by which tradition decreed that the ladder of the profession must be climbed. The art of bullfighting is so mature, so hide-bound, so rigidly and exhaustively hemmed in by canons of immemorial antiquity, that the would-be torero has to submit to a code of immutable rules and an inexorable discipline for which I was quite unfitted. I realised this clearly from the very start. So far from being ready to bow to the ancient gospels, I believed that I was the prophet of a new revelation.

* The *coleta*, a short pigtail only about three inches long, is the torero's badge of office. When he cut this pigtail it was a symbol of his intention to retire. Today, the torero only pins on an artificial coleta when he puts on his costume.



"When it bad us on the ground it would trample on us, dribble over us, bite us."

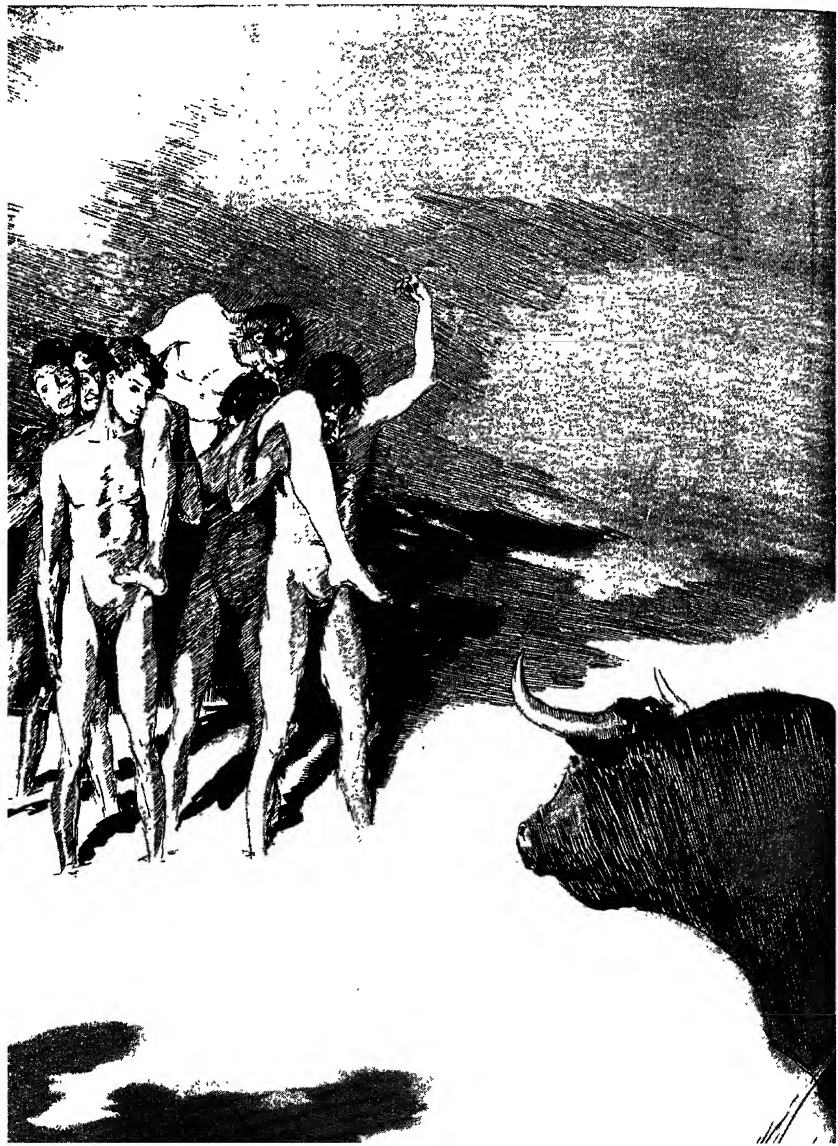
So I joined up with the lads of San Jacinto, who all had the same protestant and revolutionary attitude as myself. They were a wild lot who had broken heroically away from everything. They never went to the *tentaderos* to be put through their paces, they wore no pigtails, and they made no effort to catch the eyes of the impresarios in the cafés of the Calle Sierpes. They had no respect for reputations, they had no patrons, and they had no practical ambitions in life. They were embittered and rather cruel people, with a supreme contempt for everything they looked at. Bombita and Machaquito were at that time the greatest figures in bullfighting, but to us they were just clowns. We acknowledged only one master, and that was Antonio Montes: he was a legend that we elaborated lovingly, and on the strength of our vague references to him we came to believe that we were the unique apostles of his technique, which in our opinion was the only technique worthy of consideration. We were all firmly convinced that we fought in his style; and with that conviction we regarded the bullfighters who were then at the summit of their popularity with implacable disdain.

Perhaps I was driven into their arms by the reaction of any normal high-spirited young man who wants to assert his personality and finds himself pushed back by others stronger and better off than himself. When you can't climb you are apt to fall, and the fall is always likely to take you to extremes. The arrogant self-sufficiency of these mutineers and their contempt for all established values consoled me for my humiliations. And at least their heresy was sincere and honest. They had nothing to gain by it, and they had every reasonable expectation of dying of biliousness at their soft-drink kiosk before any ranchers or impresarios came to look for them. But on the other hand there was the pride of pioneering,

"I felt its quivering mass brushing against my body."



*"We stood like statues, impassively offering it our naked bodies bathed
by the moonlight."*



the joy of smashing the old idols, the glory of breaking loose from all the old complicated conventions in which the art of bullfighting had been smothered. And there was also the fun of booing and chivvying the smug young *novilleros** who ventured to pass within range of our stronghold.

The conquest of these rebels was by no means easy, for they were as proud as Lucifer. Certainly they professed to be anarchists; but they were just as jealous of their integrity as any of the orthodox cliques, and even more particular about whom they admitted into their exclusive circle. But in spite of their rebuffs, I felt myself irresistibly attracted towards them. I had to go through a gruelling initiation to win their good-will. The first thing I had to learn was never to be without tobacco: these heretics, whose principles in bullfighting were incorruptible, could themselves be corrupted with a cigarette. And then I had to run their errands, put up with their bloodthirsty practical joking, and perform a hundred and one menial services. Also I had to go on long expeditions into the country to find out if there were bulls in the corrals and pastures.

These lads had a new way of practising bullfighting. The customary thing for an *aficionado* to do was to go to *capeas*† or get permission from the ranchers to try a pass or two at the trials, where their nervousness and inexperience provided plenty of entertainment for the assembled guests. To the brotherhood of San Jacinto this procedure seemed much too undignified. They went out into the country to fight the rancher's bulls without his permission, in defiance of the guards, the constabulary, and the

* A novillero is a man who fights novillos, as distinct from a matador, who fights full-grown bulls.

† Public bullfights held in the villages, where the square is barricaded off and a bull let loose for any amateur who fancies himself to try his hand.

whole majesty of the Law. They were the enemies of all established order, the complete outlaws. As time went on they maintained the same anarchistic attitude towards life in general as they had towards bullfighting. I have had to send money and cigarettes to nearly all of them in prison, where they have got themselves put away from time to time as dangerous extremists.

It was my job to set out in the afternoon for the Tablada grazing lands to find out if there was any herd about which could be fought. It was a seven- or eight-mile hike across country, and one had to avoid meeting the guards, who had a well-founded distrust of all boys who came near the herd. Then I had to come back and give my friends an account of my explorations, and if there were indeed bulls in the enclosures the expedition was promptly organised. We met at our refreshment stand and fixed the time of our departure so that the moon would be well up when we reached the pastures. We had to take the footpaths to avoid encountering any of the Guardia Civil,* and we had to do without a proper cloak because that would have been evidence against us if we were stopped. We used a coat belonging to Riverito, whom we all acknowledged as the most proficient.

When we got to the corral we would separate a promising-looking bull—usually the biggest one we could find. For the most part they were inferior stock, bred for meat rather than fighting; and when we had laboriously separated the animal it would rarely charge without a lot of provocation or until after it had turned round a few times and decided that there was no other way of escape.

* One of the many kinds of Spanish police. Their job is principally to guard the highways and to act as police in villages that have no other police force of their own. They are also employed in the towns in times of civil commotion, for which reason they are always assigned to districts a long way from their homes.

Riverito played it first, which was his privilege as the leader. The others patiently waited for their turn, and no one ever dared to butt in before his allotted time. When Riverito had finished, he would pass the coat to the next man, and so we would follow each other in strict order. The social grades of that band of anarchists were religiously respected. The best fighter took the coat first; the least expert was relegated inexorably to the last place. Everyone's position was tacitly recognised by the others, and there was never any other ranking among us than that of unanimously respected merit.

I started by being the last in order, and when all the others had had enough they handed the coat to me to do the best I could with it. Naturally this wasn't much.

But one night something happened that upset all the accepted rules of precedence. Following our custom of playing the largest animal we could find, we had separated a huge bull which attacked from the first moment instead of trying to get away like the others. Accustomed as we were to half-blooded stock which only charged when it was cornered, we were completely disconcerted by the vigorous attack of that mountainous bull which only had to see the shadow of a bullfighter to launch itself at him like a streak of lightning. In four or five rushes it put the fear of God into our party, and very soon it stood alone in the centre of the enclosure with its head in the clouds and its horns goring at the moon, while the gladiators flattened themselves against the fence and urged each other to attract its attention in any direction except their own. But the truth was that nobody wanted to take it on, and the bull was the unquestioned master of the arena.

"Has this bull got us licked?" I thought. "Are we supposed to be fighting it or is it fighting us?"

I waited trembling for a few seconds—I don't know whether with fear or jubilation. It wasn't my turn to take the field, but none of my companions would make a move and the bull was still waiting there. A few paces away lay the coat we were using, which had been lost in the débâcle. I stretched out my arm. When I had the coat in my hand I straightened up and moved slowly towards the bull. It pawed the ground and watched me approach, measuring the distance, and at the exact moment it hurled itself at me like a hurricane. I stood firm and led it past me with the coat. It turned quickly, kicking up a cloud of dust, and again I made it pass me. I had hardly recovered my position when it was on me again. I felt its quivering mass brushing against my body. Again and again I led it past, until at last I gave it a *recorte* which left it rooted to the ground and staring at me as if it couldn't make out what had happened to it. I turned my back on it and carelessly threw down the coat for anyone else to play with who felt like it, and the ovation I was giving myself almost deafened me.

After that night I was never again the last to fight. When the leader of the band gave up the coat, I would step forward and take it over as if I was exercising an indisputable right. I had won the position in fair combat, and nobody questioned my superiority. Nevertheless, the truth is that I was never the absolute leader.

I lived for nothing but bullfighting. At home everything went from bad to worse, and poverty was gaining on us every day. My father was loaded down with children whom he hardly knew how to feed with his pitifully meagre little business; and I, who was the

eldest, pretended not to see the catastrophe which was overtaking my family. I was indifferent to anything but my passion for bullfighting and my loyalty to the brotherhood of young bullfighters to whom I had given myself up heart and soul. I suppose every adolescent young man who finds himself out of tune with his environment is liable to find absorption in some such mystical ideal, whether it may be social, political, or artistic, in which he can find an outlet for all his frustrated energy; and I was no exception.

In the morning I would sometimes think bitterly about the plight in which I was leaving my family, and I would go penitently to the stall and help my father with the greatest cheerfulness and every intention of mending my ways. But it wouldn't be long before one of the gang would drift along to look me up.

"We're going to the country tonight," he would remark casually.

"Well, you'll have to go without me," I would tell him curtly.

He would stare at me.

"What—are you quitting? There are some fine bulls, I tell you."

My good resolutions would weaken before the prospect of the night's fascinating adventure.

"Are there really good bulls?"

"There are. The moon rises at half past twelve. We're meeting at eleven o'clock at San Jacinto."

And with that I would be lost. I would think of nothing else but the chances of the coming night, its innumerable risks and the pleasure of overcoming them. The oddments stall, the troubles of my family, and even the alluring image of my sweetheart of the moment, vanished from my mind like shadows.

I never felt any of that all-absorbing emotion with which love is supposed to fill a young man. Love for me was no more than a

passing distraction; my sweethearts followed each other as night follows day, and left no more trace. Bullfighting was the only passion that dominated me. The girls of the quarter whom I courted in the dim patios of Triana pass through my memory like shadows on a screen, and leave nothing but a vague recollection of their charms. I can recall little more than the sensual caress of their silk blouses and the penetrating scent of jasmines in their hair.

So I would leave my sweetheart without remorse, and at midnight the seven of us would set out along the road towards San Juan de Aznalfarache in search of the risk and adventure of the bulls. To cross the river we would prowl through the cornfields until we found a boat to borrow. We would push it out into the stream with the mudsucking around our ankles, put out the oars, and paddle jubilantly away. One of us would lean over the side and spit at the reflection of the moon in the rippling water, and begin to sing some soft and haunting gypsy song which reached no further than the reeds along the bank where our wake whispered and curdled. Sometimes we would pass a barge laden with melons tied up in a bend of the stream while the bargee slept. We would help ourselves to a few of them and go on our way nibbling them contentedly with the juice running down our chins.

When we reached Tablada the pasture would be bathed in the milky blue light of the moon. As we approached the enclosure we would fall silent; the oars would move quietly with short slow strokes until the boat grounded in the mud. One of us would get out first to reconnoitre, and if he reported that there was no one else in sight we would all disembark and wriggle through the barbed wire into the enclosure. We would move on cautiously, taking as much cover as we could among the bushes and cactus,

until we heard the silence suddenly broken by the tinkling movement of a belled ox.

"There are bulls!" we would breathe triumphantly.

Then would come the hard labour of running all over the field, which bristled with thorns and thistles, in order to separate the bull which we wanted to play, tire it out, and drive it into a corner.

On some nights, when we were absorbed in the task of moving the herd from one side to the other, we would hear the hoof-beats of a mounted guard coming to look for us. Towards the guards we had an attitude of open insubordination. We tried not to let them surprise us; but when they did, the most that our dignity would allow us to do was to withdraw, but we never ran. We simply carried out a strategic retreat, without putting ourselves out or losing any of our cockiness; and the guard, who didn't want any trouble either, contented himself with keeping up appearances and letting us go in peace.

Because of the inefficiency of the private guards, the Guardia Civil were ordered to join in the persecution of amateur bullfighters. One night I was keeping watch while my comrades were playing a bull, and I saw two suspicious shapes advancing towards me. I hid behind a tree and called to them to halt.

"Who are you?" I demanded. The figures separated a little and continued to advance without answering.

"Take one step more and I'll shoot," I shouted, and at the same time I covered them with the old pistol barrels which I had bought in the Thursday market when I was going to be a lion-hunter. I clinked a couple of coins together to make them think that the guns were being cocked, and saw that the two shapes flattened themselves hastily into the ground. Elated with my daring I threatened them again.

"Stay where you are and keep still until we've gone. If one of you makes a move I'll roast him!"

The two figures did not move. It seemed to me that they were whispering. I whistled to the others according to our code of signals for them to get away, and while they were making tracks for the boat I kept watch on the intruders. As my eyes gradually became accustomed to the darkness I began to make out their contours more clearly. Something gleamed in their hands and on their heads. When I discovered that the gleams came from the barrels of their Mausers and their shiny three-cornered hats, the blood froze in my veins. If I start running now, I thought, they'll kill me like a dog. I crept backwards inch by inch, holding my breath; and when I thought I was at a safe distance I flew rather than ran to the boat where my companions were waiting for me.

A few nights later one of the Guardia Civil did put a bullet through a young bullfighter who was trespassing in exactly the same way as we did.

One night in the enclosure, a bull caught one of the boys and left him stretched out unconscious on the ground. We picked him up and carried him towards the river bank. We were all as naked as the day we were born, having swum across the river and left our clothes on the other side. As it was impossible for the injured lad, who was still bleeding, to swim back, we had to tramp along the bank looking for a boat. We found one at last, and began to carry our unfortunate comrade along to it. There were five of us besides the casualty.

The tide was out, and between the firm ground and the boat there was a broad belt of mud and reeds where our feet sank up to the ankles under the weight of our burden. We were moving forward slowly and laboriously when we saw a big full-grown bull with

finely developed horns emerging from the river and coming towards us. It saw us, and stood with its head up looking at the strange procession. And then it let out a roar and lowered its head as if it was going to charge us.

I believe that the first impulse that flashed through all our minds was to drop our friend and run for our lives. Fortunately the clay in which our feet were embedded paralysed this instinctive reaction, and whether we liked it or not we stayed there huddled together with the boy on our shoulders. Something similar must have happened to the bull, for its feet were similarly stuck in the slime, checking the attack which it had begun. At that precise moment somebody spoke:

"Keep still ! Do a Don Tancredo!"*

It was marvellous. Everyone stood still, as if frozen into marble, in the position in which the warning had caught him. Naked, immobile, crushed together, and holding up the inanimate body of our friend, we must have formed a most curious piece of sculpture. Fear gave us an amazing rigidity. One of us was caught with his arm raised, and thus he stayed, absolutely motionless, as if he had been cast in bronze.

The startled bull gazed at us fixedly. Then it stepped forward slowly, lashing its loins with its tail and only waiting for the provocation of the slightest movement. We stood like statues, impassively offering it our naked bodies bathed by the moonlight. The bull took a few more steps, looked at us, and looked at us again, each time seeming a little more puzzled by that strange monument in living flesh which had been erected in its dominions.

* A trick sometimes performed in the bullring, in which a bullfighter stands on a box in the middle of the arena when the bull is first let out. If he remains absolutely motionless the bull is supposed to sniff all around him and go away without attacking him. This practice, however, is not favourably viewed by insurance companies.

The damned brute took a century to convince itself. Again and again, whenever it seemed as if it was going away, it would turn round and look at us again; until at last after an eternity of time it finally turned its bored back on us, dragged its hooves out of the mud one by one, and with maddening deliberation went its leisured way.

We breathed again when the doctor at the emergency hospital in Triana told us that our friend's wound was not serious. We explained that he had torn himself accidentally on a nail.

5

Some busybody came to our kiosk at San Jacinto and said:

"I see they've put a stop to your poaching around Tablada. I'll bet none of you has the nerve to try anything with the guard they've got there now."

"Well, who have they got?" we inquired, "Hercules?"

"They've got Niño Vega, and he's sworn to put a bullet in the first trespasser he sees."

Niño Vega was a tough from La Macarena who had made himself famous in the district for four or five exploits which deserved to have earned him either a pension or a life sentence. His presence in Triana was a setback for us, for the former guard had been a good fellow who tried to do his duty without any bloodshed.

As a result of that, our gang had come to believe that the whole country belonged to them; and we had taken over Tablada for our private school of bullfighting. On moonlit nights we fought in the corrals, and in the summer we played the bulls in the pasture in broad daylight. This fighting of bulls in the open grazing lands was

what we liked best, but it was not a pleasure to be easily achieved. We had to hike for hours through the country under the burning sun, threading our way through the wild cactus with our naked bodies exposed to the pitiless thorns, and sometimes we would spend the whole day in that parched inferno without meeting the difficult combination of circumstances which we needed to practise our sport. Afterwards, when I returned home exhausted, my unfortunate sister had to spend half the night patiently picking out the thorns which were studded all over my body, while I lay on my bed sleeping the sleep of the dead.

When we fought on the pasture in daylight, we left our clothes hidden in a thicket by the river bank and swam across with our shoes tied to our heads. Naked as our mothers brought us into the world, our skins as insensible as the hides of salamanders to the fire which beat down from the sky, we roamed nimbly between the cactus and thorn scrub until we were able to head off a bull; and right there, in any clearing, we would challenge it with our bodies bare to its onslaught and only the old jacket in our hands to lead it past. In my opinion, that fighting of bulls in the open country, with the arena limited only by the horizon, with the fighter stark naked and the hairy hide of the beast brushing his bronzed skin at every pass, is something utterly different and incomparably superior to fighting in the bullring, dressed up in the traditional costume, and hemmed in by the dappled tiers of humanity in search of its Sunday afternoon's excitement.

The first day we went to Tablada after Niño Vega had been put on guard, we were playing a young cow in the open field when our sentinel gave the danger signal, and we saw that that formidable warrior was coming towards us at full gallop. We left the cow and moved off towards the river, prepared to dive in and swim across

to the other bank. As I have explained, it was the accepted rule that when the guard came, we went; but it was just as much an unwritten law that the guard would not be in such a hurry to catch up with us that we should not have time to retire with a certain amount of decorum. But Niño Vega didn't seem to have heard of this, and he was spurring after us with his carbine in the sling and an ominous scowl on his face. We were ashamed to break into a run, and so he caught up with us before we had got into the water.

We were on that belt of mud left by the tide, ploughing our difficult way towards the stream, when the guard dismounted on the edge of the solid ground a few paces from us and challenged us with his rifle in his hands.

"Hey," he bawled. "Come here!"

We turned our backs on him and went on without answering, but he went on shouting at us.

"Don't be so frightened! I'm not going to eat you. Come here—I've got something to tell you."

With the mud up to their knees, the others had almost reached the water; but I had been slower to start and I had been left some way behind. Furious because they paid no attention to him, Niño Vega shouted directly at me:

"Hey you! Come here! I've got a message to give you. Don't be such a coward."

I didn't like to be talked to like that, so I turned round and yelled back at him:

"Well, what do you want anyway?"

"I want you to come here—if you've got the guts."

"I'll go there, or anywhere else I please," I retorted. "Is that what you want?"

I wrenched my heels out of the mud in a real fury, and in two

strides I planted myself next to him with every ambition of wringing his neck.

"What is it, you big windbag? And why did they take you out of the gutter where you belong?"

He pushed his hat back from his face with a peaceable gesture.

"It's just—just that I wanted to have a few words with you," he answered.

"Well, here I am. What are you waiting for?"

Niño Vega was a grown man with plenty of aplomb, and an old hand at the professional bravo's trick of wriggling out of danger behind a screen of belligerent words, or at least using them to wait for his chance to get in a decisive blow. He looked me in the face—I must have been livid—and lowering his voice to a more conciliatory tone he said:

"It's just—that you don't seem to know what you're doing, and one day you'll be getting into a lot of trouble if you don't think things over. You're always coming here to fight bulls, and you know that it's not allowed. The other day a cow fell down and injured itself and it had to be killed. Don't you think that's an abuse?"

"Yes, old man," I stammered, completely disarmed, "but——"

"Never mind the 'old man' and the 'buts.' What I want you to do, if you don't mind, is to give me a little consideration. Put yourselves in my place."

"Really," I promised awkwardly, "you needn't worry any more——"

I had set out to knock his head off, and now I was having to make excuses to him. My companions were paddling in the water and watching the comedy from some distance, completely surprised by the turn it had taken. Already Niño Vega and I were making

courteous explanations to each other and mutually justifying ourselves in the most cordial phrases that we could put together. When we concluded our discussion, Niño Vega picked up his carbine as if he had no further use for it, lifted it up by the barrel, and said in the most convincing way in the world:

"And don't run away with the idea that you can get my goat again in that costume, because . . . "

I looked myself up and down. I was unarmed, naked, and defenceless. I hadn't a stitch of clothing on except my cap, with which I had been modestly covering my middle while we were talking.

" . . . because if you do," he went on firmly, "I'll catch you a smack that'll split you open before you can blink. Do you get me?"

I looked at myself again. All my rage had flickered out. Really I was at his mercy. What could I have done? Thrown my cap at him?

"You're right," I admitted.

We said goodbye to each other in the most friendly way. I learned that day that courage alone is not enough, and he for his part must have learned that courage alone is plenty. If I hadn't stood up to him, he would have hounded us like vermin and put an end to our expeditions. But from then on he respected us and gave us the consideration which was our due, although naturally without failing to do his duty. There are ways and ways, as the *flamencos* say.

There was another day when we were on the road to Tablada. I had dropped a little way behind the others, when they suddenly came face to face with the owner of a launch which we had "borrowed" on various occasions to cross the river. This man had a number of cows, and used the launch to go and cut fodder for them;

and when he went out in the morning and found his launch abandoned on the opposite side of the river, or spent two or three days without finding it at all, he would go mad with rage. He was a strong man and a bit of a bully, and when he saw the others he rushed at them like a wild boar. I don't know what they said to him, but the result was that he hauled out a pistol and fired a shot. My companions fled in disorder; and the cowherd, after trying in vain to catch them, caught sight of me. Blind with fury, he flung himself at me and stuck the gun into my chest.

"You're another of the brats who steal my launch!" he shouted.

I looked at him steadily; and with one of those inexplicable reactions I knocked the pistol aside and snapped back at him:

"Who the hell do you think you're talking to?"

This sally, which must have been the last thing he expected, left him rather perplexed. He was disconcerted by my standing still instead of running away, and began to stammer:

"Well—you—you see—you pinch my launch and make yourselves a confounded nuisance. Think what a lot of trouble you give me. I can't feed my cows!"

"What do I care about that?" I retorted.

"Listen, old man—don't get mad. Those brats are enough to drive anyone crazy."

We returned to Triana arm in arm and had several drinks together. I kept his pistol in my pocket. I ended up by brazenly admitting that I myself was one of the lads who borrowed his launch to go bullfighting. And nothing happened.

Thus I learned that the first thing in fighting, whether with men or animals, is to stand your ground. The man who stands still dominates the situation. Hence my "standstill technique" in the ring, as the critics call it.

We were a lawless crowd. Bullfighting was our only outlet, the natural expression of our adventurous and rebellious and danger-loving temperaments in the environment in which we lived. The least important thing in our heroic sorties to Tablada was the bull. Certainly, when we did come face to face with it after overcoming all the dangers and difficulties which stood in the way, it was a triumphant moment; but it was only a moment. As a matter of fact, there were many boys who risked their necks with us to go bullfighting who had no great enthusiasm for the fighting itself. Of course the outstanding members of the gang, such as Riverito, Petizo, Pestaña, and another, had genuine pretensions to being bullfighters. I myself had them; and I was concentrating more and more on the technique of bullfighting and its artistic refinements. I persuaded myself that I fought like Antonio Montes by some miraculous intuition of his style, which I was convinced that I had revived from the grave. I enjoyed practising passes in front of a mirror, and gradually built up what was later to be my style on a foundation of the conditions in which I was forced to fight. Nothing important can have an arbitrary origin; and if I fought as I did it was because in the country, and at night, you had to do it like that. You had to follow the whole trajectory of the bull with every bit of your attention because if it got far away from you it lost itself in the darkness and it was a ticklish business to find it again; and as we had nothing but an ordinary coat to fight with, you had to keep the bull very close and tightly played. Thus my style developed the qualities which were afterwards to be called quite arbitrary characteristics; and yet it was nothing but those

circumstances which taught me to fight as I did.

On the other hand, there were others who had none of these professional preoccupations. They went for the adventure, the joy of going out into the world and fighting against adversity. They were just partners in our craziness and rebellion.

For instance, there was a carpenter, an honest and serious lad apart from the streak of insanity which took him roaming through the pastures and corrals with us. I was the one who introduced him to the gang, and he joined in our expeditions with more enthusiasm than anyone. Sometimes we would leave Sevilla at eight o'clock at night, soon after his work was over; we would walk for four or five hours; then in the enclosure we would have to chase our bull tirelessly from one side to the other until we got it where we wanted it; we would spend the small hours of the morning playing it; and towards dawn we would set out again on the long tramp back to Sevilla, as hungry as lions and as weary as galley slaves. We others would get back in the morning and sleep until it was time for us to meet again at our refreshment kiosk and go on with our loafing; but the worthy carpenter had to go straight to his shop and work until six o'clock in the evening. And the really extraordinary thing was that this man who suffered so much for the sake of bullfighting was incapable of putting himself in front of a bull. He never threw a cape in his life. After spending the whole night tramping and running after bulls, when at last he had one in front of him and we passed the coat for him to play it, he would begin to edge away and find excuses to get out of it.

"Come on, brother," we would say. "It's your turn now."

Whereupon he would say:

"Just a minute—I must get myself warm first. You can't fight when you're cold."

Or something to the same effect. .

Sometimes we goaded him on until we had exhausted all his excuses, but it was no use. Trembling like a kitten, this man who ran so many risks and endured so many hardships in order to find bulls to fight, was seized with uncontrollable panic when the time came to fight one. The same thing happened over and over again, but it never disillusioned him.

Two or three years ago I met him again. He must have been all of fifty then, grey-haired and frankly old.

"You must help me to get put on at a novillada," he said. "I just want one chance to test myself. I'm very strong, you know. Besides, my mother is dead now, and I must find out once and for all whether I'd make a good torero."

7

The most serious thing in Spain, so they say, is the Guardia Civil; and we soon had occasion to prove its fundamental seriousness. With the Guardia Civil there was no room for backchat or bravado. They simply threw up their Mausers and blazed away—I have already mentioned how they shot down one boy who was trying to poach his bullfighting. But we were determined to keep up our bullfighting in spite of hell and high water. On moonlight nights the Guardia Civil prowled watchfully about the pastures and corrals with their rifles at the ready; but on dark nights their vigilance relaxed, because it was clearly impossible for anyone to play a bull which couldn't be seen a foot away from your nose. So we invented a method of fighting on moonless nights. We got hold of two acetylene lamps, and with their

flickering light we managed to fight when neither the Guardia Civil nor anyone else would venture into the pitch-dark fields. We still had to corner our bull in the darkness; and naturally we sometimes had the disagreeable surprise of running our outstretched hands straight into the side of a bull with which we had almost collided as we groped blindly about. We would apologise ceremoniously and hop out of the way as best we could.

These added difficulties helped to confirm the characteristics of my style, for once the bull got any distance away it was lost in the surrounding darkness. You had to keep it constantly within reach of you, because the danger of its proximity was less than the danger of standing dazzled in the circle of light and waiting for the attack of an invisible enemy. To increase the illumination, while one of us was playing the bull another would hold a box behind the lamp to act as a reflector. Fighting bulls in such conditions was a labour which ought to have knocked all the enthusiasm out of us, but the truth is that we still kept our sense of humour. I remember when one of the gang whose sight was none too good was fighting, and somebody clapped the box over the lamp so that the light was cut off just as the bull was facing him for another charge. He let out a frightened squeal and leapt frantically for safety; but when he looked back from the security of the fence the box was once more fulfilling its proper function as a projector and he couldn't understand what had happened.

"The trouble is that you can't see anything," we told him. "You're getting more short-sighted every day."

In ways like this we kept up our spirits and light-heartedly tackled the obstacles which stood in the way of our bullfighting ambitions.

The light of the lamps which we had at this time was rather scanty; but one night we learned that a Hungarian travelling

circus which had pitched its tents in Triana possessed some powerful acetylene lamps which immediately aroused our envy. We decided that where those lamps ought really to be shedding their light was on the corrals of Tablada, and we organised a scheme that went off like clockwork. One of the gang started to make a scene at the entrance of the circus, and while the Hungarians crowded round to argue with him the rest of us sneaked to the back and helped ourselves to the coveted lamps. When they discovered their loss the wretched Hungarians were completely in the dark.

On the other hand, from that night on, the corrals of Tablada blazed like the entrance of a theatre. We found a cache for the apparatus out there in the pasture itself; and when we went out to fight it was only a matter of ten minutes to rig up our superb installation of acetylene lighting.

8

I didn't want to go that night. I didn't want to go because I was wearing a new suit which I had managed to buy for Holy Week at the cost of innumerable small economies; but the others persuaded me, and I couldn't resist. So off I went to Tablada again to fight bulls, all dressed up in my Sunday best.

We were on the job of breaking up the herd when we spotted some suspicious-looking shadows moving stealthily towards us. Thinking it was the Guardia Civil, we scattered rapidly in all directions. I was too slow to scramble over the wall, so I hid myself as best I could and waited to see what would happen. As the figures came closer I soon realised that they were not *guardias*.

"Who are you?" I hailed them.

"We are *aficionados*," answered a small piping voice.

They turned out to be some youngsters of ten or twelve who had pluckily set out to try their luck in Tablada, bringing with them a real bullfighter's cloak. It wasn't so extraordinary—the legend of our nocturnal raids on the pastures had spread all over Triana, and several *aficionados* had started to imitate us. There were even some admirers who came out just to watch us; although it was really just as dangerous for the spectators as for the toreros, and one of them did once get badly gored.

I sent the boys off to tell the rest of the gang that there was no danger and also told them where to find our acetylene lamps so that they could bring them along on their way back. Meanwhile I tried to round up a bull which we had previously separated from the herd. They were a long time getting back; and while they were away I managed to run the bull into a corner, where I kept it moving restively about in the hope that we should be able to fight it.

At last the boys returned to tell me that they hadn't been able to find the rest of the gang or the place where we kept our lamps. It was a pity, because the bull was there, rearing about and butting its head angrily against the fence. But the others must have gone home, and it was impossible to fight without lights on such a dark night.

All the same, there was the bull, getting more furious every minute; and although it was completely invisible when it moved a few inches away from the fence I was beginning to feel an irresistible yearning to fight it. I had the cape which the children had brought in my hands, and every time I leaned over the fence and flipped it over the bull I could feel its splendid response to the challenge. The

nearness of the bull and the feel of a genuine torero's cape in my hands obliterated all other considerations. I began to persuade myself that I could really see, when it was only my anxiety to fight which helped me to guess the movements of the bull.

I couldn't hold out any longer. I swung myself over the fence and opened the cape to the vast blackness of the night, pretending that I could penetrate it like a cat. I felt the bull launch its attack, I saw or guessed its rush towards me, and I turned my body. The black thunderbolt leapt momentarily out of the night and vanished instantly into the night again, brushing my waist as it went by. It turned and passed close to me again, led past by the folds of the cape, like a meteor flung at me out of the shadows; but on the third charge the bull didn't see the cape and I didn't see the bull. I felt myself hurled into the air with a terrific shock; it caught me again between its horns and flung me savagely to the ground.

I lay curled up there without knowing where I was. I couldn't see the bull. The night had swallowed it up again. Then I heard the children beginning to cry, and from the sound of their sobs I managed to get my bearings. I started to try and drag myself towards the fence; but I had scarcely begun to move when the bull flung itself on me again out of the darkness. Again I felt myself hurled into the air, bounced, shaken, and thrown away like a rag. My face was wet with blood. I lay pressed against the stones, listening to the children who were weeping pitifully. I must have been two or three yards from the fence; but nearer than that, much nearer, the menacing white horns of the bull loomed mercilessly over me. Those two white curves were the only thing that stood out clearly from the black void of the night. Again I tried to get away, and again the horns fell on me like lightning. But that time, as I fell, I actually bumped against the boards of the

fence, and with a desperate effort I dragged myself to safety.

The only reason the bull hadn't killed me must have been because my time had not yet come.

The terrified children picked me up and touched my blood-stained face, asking me frantically if I was still alive.

I felt myself. It was all I could do to pull myself together. My face was skinned, my body was bruised all over, and—my suit was in ribbons. My suit for Holy Week!

I was seized with an inhuman fury. My suit for Holy Week! Blind with rage and desperation, I tore myself out of the hands of the boys who were trying to comfort me and climbed back over the fence. I rushed at the bull like a madman, shrieking abuse at it and raining blows on it with hands and feet. Before that storm of kicks and punches which beat over its head, the poor bull must have been completely flabbergasted. Quite certainly it was unable to make out how such a thing could happen; and the whole affair must have seemed so extraordinary to it that instead of taking up the challenge it began to retreat. "This is not reasonable," it must have thought to itself.

They talked about it in the Altozano for days afterwards with bated breath.

The soft-drink stand which was the headquarters of our band of bullfighting anarchists under the wall of San Jacinto has disappeared. It saddened me when they took it away to make room for some municipal gardens, for it was there that I spent the most restless and turbulent period of my adolescence.

It was a typical specimen of the architecture which was in vogue forty years ago for those humble forerunners of the modern soda fountain—covered with complicated decorations, with coloured crystal globes hanging from the ceiling and wide curled-up eaves like a Japanese pagoda. The owner was a character; an amateur fireman, an enthusiastic bullfight fan, and on the whole a little bit potty, like the rest of us. There can be no other explanation of why he put up with that undesirable clientele of young bullfighters who spent no more than the price of a halfpenny cup of tea. Since we were loafing there from the morning of one day until the small hours of the next, we scared off all the other possible clients, and constituted a perpetual nuisance to the neighbours and an annoyance to the passers-by—so much so that some people took to making a wide detour around the stall to avoid us.

Even the proprietor wasn't exempt from our badgering, and on the nights when he was on duty at the theatre and came back in his red fireman's uniform the jeers and catcalls were ear-splitting. He took to paying our admission to bullfights on condition that we should jump into the arena; and every Saturday we raffled a ticket for the next day's fight, well knowing the obligation that went with it. I think the poor man was so tired of us that whenever he sent one of us to a bullfight he hoped that a bull would get rid of him. But bulls score fewer hits than some people think, and in those days jumping into the ring cost no more than a night in the lock-up. And everyone had some friend who knew La Borbolla, the popular boss of Sevilla, who would get you let out again soon enough.

There was one bullfight when it came to my turn to jump into the ring. They were fighting some big and difficult bulls of Coruche, and when our stall-keeper gave me the ticket he must have felt fairly optimistic about getting rid of me for ever. He was

doomed to disappointment—not because I was unready to carry out my share of the bargain, but because the circumstances prevented it. The bulls that day were so accurate that they sent the three matadors to the hospital one after another. I was naturally waiting for the last bull before I jumped into the ring; but the last bull didn't come out because there were no toreros left in any condition to fight it. This put me in an even worse light than before.

Since this process of elimination failed to show any results, the stall-keeper had to go on enduring us. Really we must have been a frightful gang. Nobody else dared to pass by the kiosk. Since there were six or seven of us all ready to punch the nose of anybody who took exception to our behaviour, we did more or less as we pleased; and even other local toughs with some reputation for courage would resign themselves to our aggressions and sneak by with their tails between their legs rather than get into trouble.

This went on until one day a filthy dirty beggar woman happened to pass by, and we conceived the brilliant idea of chanting "Soap! Soap! Soap!" at her. The old hag turned and came straight back to the stall with her arms akimbo; and that was the end of us. She started by criticising the conduct of our mothers, passed on to that of our grandmothers, and continued until she had made it plain that right back to the fifth generation there had been no females in our ancestry who did not deserve the saliva of her toothless and blasphemous mouth. She remained the unchallenged mistress of the field.

But for one old crone who answered back, there were plenty of timid girls and unfortunate women who had to suffer our impertinences in silence.

One of the gang specialised in addressing fantastic pleasantries

or offensive remarks to the girls who went by. One day as a prim young maiden came past, he stepped up to her and said:

"How do you do, murderess?"

The girl stopped and stared at him; and not quite knowing how to go on he added:

"Yes, murderess . . . because you're starving your poor mother to death."

This stupid remark left the girl dumbfounded for a moment; and our friend indicated the youth next to him with the most unruffled assurance and said: "I've got his word for it."

The girl flushed red with shame and anger, and took to her heels. We stayed there sniggering and talking over the joke; but ten minutes hadn't gone by when the girl returned leading a plump and shining matron by the hand.

"This is my mother," she told us. "Does she look as if she was starving to death?"

Whereupon both of them continued to make unflattering remarks about our families.

Thus our fruitless existence went on. Hopelessly out of adjustment with the world, with a keen sense of the ridiculous and no sense of shame, above all with the secret despair of feeling ourselves to be outcasts, we took an aggressive and intractable attitude which must have made us completely detestable. The best thing in our lives was the heroism of the night, the adventure of the open country, the endless battle with the horns of the bulls and the rifles of the Guardia Civil. The worst thing was our rebellious, bitter, insolent behaviour at all other times. For us, everything was a subject for mockery. Life was hard for us, and we took our revenge by flinging our contempt in the faces of those who behaved like civilised human beings.

We would go in a body to crash the gate at private parties, quarrel with the host, scandalise the women, and drink all the wine we could lay our hands on. In Carnival we would march up and down the streets singing obscene songs. We used our sharpness of ingenuity to devise cruel practical jokes. One of our favourite sports was to get hold of some guileless lad and persuade him to carry contraband. We would give him some bags of earth which we made him believe were filled with tobacco, and when the victim crept out in the small hours of the morning to try to smuggle the load into Sevilla, one of the gang would follow him and raise the alarm. The poor devil would start to run as best he could under his load, and the rest of us would stream after him like a pack of hounds shouting: "There he goes!" A couple of shots fired into the air completed the job of demoralising him, and he would keep on running until he collapsed under the weight of his burden or until the police or the night watchmen caught him.

We also had certain standard butts for our pleasantries. My own most regular victim was a certain Luis Verraco, a fantastically ugly little dwarf, very nervous, slow-moving, drunken, and choleric; a well-known character in Sevilla. However badly I treated him, some incomprehensible kind of masochism always brought him back for more.

Apparently he had once been a convent messenger; but at that time he was just scrounging his way from tavern to tavern getting drunk wherever he had the chance. He wore a filthy straw hat with the crown bristling with pins to discourage the joke to which his meagre stature lent itself most readily, which was to shut him up by smacking his hat down over his ears. His favourite occupation was collecting cigarette ends, which he did with great dignity. To avoid the humiliation of having to bend down every time that he

saw one, he carried a spiked stick with which he contrived to pick them up and put them in his pocket with the greatest elegance. He was a bit of a poet, and was given to pronouncing his judgments on the world and everyone in it in the most amusing couplets. He disliked me particularly because I spoiled the effect of his verses by capping them with other less sententious couplets of my own.

I don't know what mixture of attraction and repulsion I exercised on this strange character; but the fact is that I enjoyed the luxury of taking him around with me much as a feudal baron might have taken his jester. He hated me, as jesters must always have hated their masters; but he couldn't tear himself away from me. One morning he waited for hours near my house, hidden in a doorway with an enormous rock in his arms, intending to drop it on my head and kill me. But in spite of everything he refused to leave me; and the more brutal my jokes became the more firmly he clung to me. It got to such a point that the acting mayor of the district hauled me up in court and fined me for tormenting the poor man who couldn't do without my tormenting.

A ghost appeared in San Jacinto. On certain nights it used to pass through the Cava de los Civiles, wrapped in a sheet with a light shining in its head. And the curious thing is that we, who had no reverence for anything, who feared nothing and used to chance our skins with the greatest cheerfulness, maintained a respectful reserve towards the ghost. It wasn't that we were afraid of it, but that we had a distaste for meddling with things that we couldn't understand. We saw the ghost from a distance on various occasions,

and it never occurred to us to try and solve the mystery.

One of our occupations was to lie in wait for the droves of bulls which sometimes passed through San Jacinto in the small hours of the morning on their way to Sevilla; and if we could head one of them off we played it through the streets until the vaqueros succeeded in taking it away from us. One night we got away with a bull and drove it into the Cava, to the accompaniment of the usual uproar and confusion. The bull ran down the Cava and we ran after it, with the coat in our hands, trying to catch up with it and give it a few passes. We were careering pell-mell through the Cava when we encountered a white shape clinging to the bars of a window: it was the ghost. The hood had fallen off its head, and out of the folds of the sheet wrapped round its neck rose a bald dome and a ridiculously frightened face.

We lost all our respect for it. After that, when it tried to walk again, we shied stones at it. We admitted the presence of a supernatural being, but the least we could ask it was not to scare the bulls. A ghost that couldn't fight bulls couldn't be a very high-class ghost.

II

Meanwhile my home was coming nearer to beggary every day, while I was incapable of lifting a finger to prevent it. My father couldn't get any more out of his business: the stock that he had barely managed to pay for our food, and that was rapidly becoming exhausted. I would get home from Tablada in the early morning and try to keep out of my father's way—sometimes I went to sleep under the bed so that he wouldn't see me. My sister hid me, my stepmother scolded, and whenever my father did manage to catch

sight of me he would tell me his opinion of me without mincing his words. I would listen to him shamefacedly, without being able to make any reply, because in my heart I knew that he was right; but I was unable to change my life.

Once, more bowed down with despair than ever, instead of cursing and swearing at me, my father tried to reason imploringly with me: we sat on the edge of the bed and talked sadly together, bitterly considering the ruin of our home, the poverty in which we lived, and our lack of courage to do anything for these luckless people of ours, my innocent little brothers who were going hungry through our faults. We wept together, my father and I. I was deeply moved. I offered to abandon the life I was leading, to give up the gang and the adventures of Tablada, and set to work in the oddments stall. But that same evening the others came to tell me that they were going out again; and I went with them.

I had failed again. The lure of adventure was stronger than I. And the thing that hurt me most was that in my heart I didn't believe that my passion for bulls could bring me any rewards. Whatever bravado I put on for other people's benefit, I couldn't deceive myself; and I saw with terrifying clearness that I was going nowhere, that I would never make any money out of bulls, that I should never be a bullfighter. I was absolutely convinced of it. And yet I went on. Why?

I made friends with another youth, a great *aficionado* and a seasoned veteran in the art of wandering from place to place between trials and capeas, who suggested that I should join him.

Any chance of escape was welcome to the state of mind I was in, so I decided to go with him. His experience was at least a guarantee that we shouldn't die of hunger on the road.

Our idea was to go to Villanueva de San Juan, where in those days there was a famous capea.

We duly set out; and I soon discovered that my companion was indeed a master of the art of travelling on the cheap. He knew and practised all the tricks of the gentlemen of the road.

We found a stray calf which had got away from a travelling herd, and between us we managed to round it up and drive it back to the vaqueros, who gave us two *reales* for our services. We ate that morning, and still had ten céntimos left.

"Don't waste them," advised my companion, when I suggested using them to buy tobacco.

In the afternoon we arrived at a small farm; and he went to the door with a bit of bread left over from our morning meal in one hand and our ten céntimos in the other. To the woman who came out he said:

"Would you sell us a little oil and vinegar so that we can make a *gaspacho* with this piece of bread that we have?"

This discreet proposition had its effect; and we left the farm with oil, vinegar, more bread than we had before—and, naturally, our ten céntimos as well.

"You have to know how to live, my lad," said my comrade, winking at me maliciously.

We repeated the trick with the piece of bread and the ten céntimos in various places. Sometimes my friend sent me to make the request, so as to get me trained in the art.

But one morning at a farm in Utrera which today is my own, the only answer I got was a dry "*Dios le ampare, hermano.*"

The conventional refusal to a beggar! My face fell with shame. Had I sunk to that? I was seized with a great depression, and a terrible indignation against this good-for-nothing vagabond who had degraded my lust for adventure to such a level. At least the San Jacinto gang never begged its bread from door to door. If we were hungry we robbed an orchard, in gay defiance of watchdogs and armed guards.

My companion must have realised my state of mind.

"Cheer up, sonny," he encouraged me. "There's nothing to be so upset about. You have to take things as they come, and one man isn't better than another because he asks or because he gives. You've got a lot of romantic ideas in your head, but you'll grow out of them. Hunger teaches a lot of lessons."

And giving me many healthy counsels of humility, he kept me moving on.

Eventually we got to Coripe. The capeas had gathered fifteen or twenty hungry young bullfighters to the village, who were likely to be a plague to the surrounding orchards. The commander of the local post of the Guardia Civil, who knew by experience how difficult it was to keep these half-starved youths within the limits of respect for other people's property, took charge of them as soon as they showed up and collected them under his custody. We lived in a sort of attenuated imprisonment, from which they only released us in the afternoons to make our appearance in the ring which had been rigged up in the square with carts and scaffold poles. Before the fight started a hat was passed round; and the commandant of the Guardia Civil took charge of the money which was collected and saw to it that it was spent on feeding us, only letting us loose in the village after we had filled our stomachs. It was a wise precaution.



Manfred de Lenc

"I rushed at the bull like a madman, shrieking abuse at it and raining blows on it with hands and feet."



entree de l'air

The money that was left over after paying for our keep was divided equally between us. One day we collected fifteen céntimos each.

Apart from this, anyone who put on an extraordinary individual performance was entitled to pass the hat for his own benefit. My companion solemnly announced that we would perform a Don Tancredo, a trick which was then very popular in the country villages. Naturally, the one who had to perform the Don Tancredo was myself. The collection netted twentythree *reales*, which for some unknown reason I had to divide with my friend. He justified it by telling me that it was his idea and I had only performed the mechanical share of carrying it out.

With a nice lining in our pockets, we left Coripe in triumph. It hadn't turned out so badly after all.

On the following day, I felt an irresistible craving to sleep in a bed. For many nights we had been sleeping in barns or stables or on the bare ground by the roadside, and my bones trembled with anticipation when I thought of the luxury of sheets and mattresses. Now we at last had enough money to pay for lodging at an inn. My companion grumbled a bit, considering that this fuss about sleeping in a bed was quite superfluous, but in the end I won him over.

At the next village we made a bee-line for the inn, and for six *reales* we secured a couple of rooms. We arrived in the early evening, but we were so anxious to try the beds that we stayed right there in the courtyard, impatiently waiting for the time when we could go upstairs.

The women of the house passed back and forth across the patio, busy with their various chores; but they finished as the evening drew on, and two or three of the girls began to comb their hair and tidy themselves up. I heard them laughing and chaffing each other

and saw them pass and repass; but I was too weary and worn out to watch them closely or even to be conscious of any curiosity they might feel about me. I sat in my corner of the patio with the peak of my cap pulled down over my eyes, humming a little and really half asleep, thinking of nothing but the seductive softness of my bed.

As the night fell, I saw one of these comely maidens cross the courtyard and go out into the hall, where she stood at the door gazing out into the street. Her back was towards me, and her graceful silhouette stood out against the blue velvet of the night. I could see the flash of her dark eyes every time she turned her head towards the shadows of the patio where I was dozing.

At last my companion came to shake me out of my coma and tell me it was time to go to bed. I undressed and stretched myself between the sheets with a delicious sense of relaxation. The pity was that I had hardly any time to enjoy the feeling, for almost as soon as my head touched the pillow I was sleeping like a log.

What time was it? How long had I been asleep? I was aroused by the touch of something soft and warm leaning on the side of the bed. As soon as I tried to stir I felt the warm restraining pressure of a hand laid over my lips. I stretched out my arms. Was I dreaming? I have never been quite sure. . . .

It was the middle of the morning when I woke up to find the ugly face of my companion leaning over me. His bundle was already done up and he was anxious to be on his way. I lay still and drowsily recollected my dreams, while his unwelcome voice drifted into my consciousness like the drumming of distant rain.

"Are you going to get up or not?"



*"Naturally, the one who had to perform the Don Tancredo
was myself."*

"No," I replied. "I'm going to stay here another night."

He thought I had gone mad, or else that my brain was fuddled with so much sleep, and tried to talk me out of it; but my mind was firmly made up. I didn't want to give him any reasons, and my incomprehensible obstinacy made him furious. He spent the whole day pointing out to me how much better it would be if we were on our way. I was in an excellent humour, and I would listen patiently to all his oratory, but without letting it make any impression on me.

"That's all very well," I invariably replied. "But I'm staying here tonight. You do what you like."

All day I was keyed up with expectation. The women of the house went about their work, but not one of them seemed to want to pay any attention to me. I watched them like a hawk, hoping to catch some gleam of intelligence, some allusion, something. . . . But there was nothing. Which of them could it be? I tried to flirt with one of them, and she promptly sent me about my business. When night came I hardly knew what to do with myself. I got into bed and lay there smoking feverishly for hour after hour. Nothing. I heard all the cocks in the neighbourhood salute the dawn, and as soon as the daylight began to filter through the shutters I threw myself out of bed and went along to my friend's room to shake him savagely out of his sleep.

We tied up our bundles and set out on the road again.

I have said that the San Jacinto gang didn't go to tentaderos. Only once did we decide to present ourselves at one of these trials.

It was no good to us. From the minute we arrived we were at

loggerheads with everything. The rancher was one of the old school, accustomed to treat young bullfighters as if they were less than human beings; a real feudal lord with sidewhiskers and broad-brimmed hat, a self-appointed Jehovah who sat enthroned among the sycophantic young bloods and pretty women, thundering his majestic comminations at the wretched creatures who aspired to the privilege of giving a pass to his calves.

"Hey, you!" his harsh voice would bawl at a tattered urchin who was stepping timidly forward with a cloth in his hands. "Are you trying to scare the cows to death with that filthy rag? Get the hell out of here, will you."*

Another youngster, a thin and sunburnt gipsy, slender as a reed, his eyes bright with fever and hunger, stepped out. Our host thought he recognised him.

"What—are you here again? I thought you'd be dead by now."

The boy attempted a smile of apology for still being alive; and the rancher chewed his big cigar and spat sideways.

"It wouldn't have been much loss—one gipsy less in the world."

The retinue of young bloods and pretty women laughed flatteringly at the witticism, and the vaqueros chased the boy away like a mangy dog.

There was nothing for us to do there. We attempted to take part, but we came in conflict with the "official" torero, a young professional with a certain reputation who had been invited by the rancher to display his skill. Whenever a good calf was brought out

* At tentaderos, of course, no animals are killed. They are simply played with the cape to test the fighting qualities of the stock. A fighting bull is never played before it enters the ring, and therefore the females are generally used for trials. On account of the limitations of the English language they can only be called "cows"; but they are of the same stock as the specially bred fighting bull, and should not be confused with the patient and placid animals from whom you get your milk.

he played it by himself. The ones he didn't like, anyone could have. We were playing anything that came along, according to our order of precedence won in fair combat with bulls, when a fine brave calf came out and the invited torero wanted to take it on.

"It's my turn now," said our companion, who was very jealous of his prerogatives.

"What do you mean—'your turn'?" retorted the torero. "There are no turns here without the boss's permission."

The rancher himself intervened.

"What's that fellow trying to do?"

"I want to have my turn, please, sir," said our friend.

"Turn? You? You get out of here if you don't want to be kicked out. Who ever saw a blond who could fight bulls?"

"What no one has ever seen," answered our comrade furiously, "is a rancher with so few manners."

Needless to say, we were duly kicked out.

14

My father and Calderón the *banderillero** were bosom friends. Calderón was a great character—an incorrigible show-off, a tremendous braggart, with all the sententiousness and swagger of the old-style torero. My father was very fond of him; and I can often remember seeing him standing by the stall, preening himself and chaffing the women who came to buy.

The first time that Calderón took me under his tutelage was

* A *banderillero* is, strictly, the man who places the *banderillas*—the barbed sticks which are planted in pairs in the bull's neck in the second stage of the fight. More generally, he is simply a subordinate member of the matador's *cuadrilla*, or team.

when I was just a whipper-snapper. I wanted to learn to swim; and Calderón, with his superb self-confidence, assured my father that he had a perfect system for teaching children to swim.

This method consisted of taking a boat, rowing me out into the middle of the river, and throwing me in. I felt I was drowning and paddled like a dog to try and get back to the boat; but Calderón, imperturbably following his perfect system, banged my knuckles with an oar and pushed me off again. It must have been a horrifying spectacle, and I certainly let out some heart-rending screams; with the result that some women who were walking along the bank realised what was happening and began to throw stones at Calderón, calling him a murderer and I don't know what else. This only made my position worse, for Calderón paid no more attention to whether I drowned or not, being fully occupied with trying to keep out of the way of the rocks that were raining round him. When I finally got out of the water I was half dead. I didn't have enough life in me to protest at the time; but that evening, when Calderón sank heavily on to his accustomed chair beside the stall, he nailed himself on a four-inch needle which I had fixed upright on the seat.

Years afterwards, when my struggles to become a bullfighter were driving my family to distraction, my father consulted Calderón about it. Calderón took me off and gave me his advice.

"Give up this business of chasing bulls at night with that gang of loafers, and go to a good tentadero to show yourself off."

I didn't want to do it, but Calderón insisted that there was no other way. He offered to recommend me to a rancher and let me know the date of the trial, since these events were then held with great secrecy in the hope of eluding the would-be fighters who invariably descended on them in swarms.

There was nothing else for it; so off I had to go one day to the Urcola ranch.

Don Félix Urcola was a brusque and serious man who personally directed the trials on his ranch with the assistance of a group of good *aficionados*, among whom were Zuloaga, Don José Tejero, Don José Manuel del Mazo, and other experts.

Some of the usual would-be bullfighters had arrived, and as usual were making a certain amount of noise. The rancher promptly ordered them off. Associating myself, as always, with the rabble, I started to go with them; but Urcola, either on account of Calderón's introduction or because I seemed less obstreperous than the others, called me back.

"You can stay. We'll see what you can do with the cows."

So I stayed behind; and when the time came I was able to fight to my heart's content.

They gave me a very brave cow; but as I was accustomed to fighting half-blooded animals and did my *verónicas* and *media verónicas* standing very close and with my hands very low, as we used to do in the country, the cow, which was very spirited and quick to turn, was always on top of me, giving the impression that at any moment it might toss me into the clouds.

My work produced a good impression on the small group of select *aficionados*. Their verdict was that I was a courageous fighter, but that I lacked the necessary skill to lead the bulls away from me—and, above all, that I kept my elbows too close to my body, so that the movements of my arms seemed stiff and ungraceful by their old-established standards.

Another man who fought that day was Don José Manuel del Mazo, a fine horseman and a man of great prestige in Andalucía, who liked to play bulls in the old and elegant style with the hands

held high, the chest thrown out, and the feet firmly planted on the ground.

When the trial was over, the experts complimented me and condescended to give me a great deal of good advice. One of them has since reminded me of that incident, and chuckled over the memory of how they solemnly and well-meaningly advised me to do exactly the opposite of what was later destined to arouse their wildest enthusiasm. They invited me to dine with them; and Francisco Palomares, "El Marino," a colourful and immensely likeable character who wanted to be a bullfighter, an aviator, and I don't know what else, made me a present of a *capote* and a *muleta*.*

Don José Manuel del Mazo also gave me fatherly advice, and offered me his protection.

"Come and see me at my house in Sevilla," he said. "I'll arrange to send you to some novilladas in Bilbao."

A few days later I went hopefully to his house. I rang the bell; and the servant looked me up and down through the bars of the grille and missed no detail of my poor and insignificant appearance.

"Not at home," she said shortly.

I went away terribly discouraged. I went back the following day, but I couldn't find the pluck to ring the bell again. I couldn't bear to think of hearing that curt and contemptuous dismissal again—"Not at home." My sensitiveness at that time was so abnormal that it was almost a disease. I walked up and down the street outside for hours without daring to go up to the door, terrified of experiencing a second time the humiliation of my first reception.

Some time later I happened to meet Don José Manuel in the street.

* The *capote* is the large heavy cape used in the first part of a bullfight; the *muleta* is the smaller red cloth draped over a stick with which the matador executes his *faena*, the last stage of the fight terminating with the kill.

"You haven't been to see me," he said reproachfully. "Apparently you're not very anxious to become a bullfighter."

He didn't know how anxious I was, or how many times I had passed trembling by the door of his house.

Calderón was my first champion. After the tentadero at Urcola's, because of his friendship with my father, because he approved of the way I fought, and also partly because he loved to know more than anybody else, he began to praise me lavishly in bullfighting circles. Whenever the subject of bulls came up, Calderón would announce, with that magnificent arrogance of his and all the incontrovertible assurance that characterised him:

"The fellow who really does fight well, the fellow who really is a phenomenon, is that boy Belmonte."

These extravagant eulogies could not possibly be contradicted, first because there was nobody capable of contradicting Calderón when he laid down the law about bullfighting, and secondly because nobody had ever seen me fight. Nevertheless, they began to give me a certain reputation as a torero in the little world of managers and small impresarios and ordinary know-alls whom I hardly knew. They took Calderón at his word; and I soon began to realise that I was regarded with a certain respect which I had done nothing to deserve. For in contrast with Calderón's inimitable self-confidence. I was still the victim of my natural shyness and timidity and my secret conviction that I should never make a success of bullfighting. That lack of faith in myself was what tortured me most; because I saw quite clearly the damage that my passion for bulls was doing to my family, and knew that I was sacrificing everything to it without hope of reward. Possibly Calderón had his illusions; perhaps even my father shared them in secret; but I, who saw myself cold-bloodedly as

I really was, reflected that all this was leading nowhere.

All the same, Calderón went on talking with great emphasis about that boy Belmonte, who was a bullfighting phenomenon.

15

And at last a contract came my way.

It came through a man in Sevilla who earned a precarious living as a bullfighters' manager—his chief claim to the title was that he had it printed on his notepaper, but he wasn't the only one. His method was to send round circular letters to the managements of small bullrings, offering them the incomparable attractions of cuadrillas which didn't exist and famous matadors that nobody had ever heard of. With one of these circular letters he had managed to make an impression on the impresario of a small Portuguese village, Elvas, where he had contracted for a bullfight in which two famous cuadrillas, one from Sevilla and the other from Triana, were to exhibit their skill. He had already given the names of the performers, the posters had been printed, and the people of Elvas were waiting expectantly to see the achievements of these celebrated gladiators; but at the last moment the chief of the Triana cuadrilla—a certain Valdivieso who fought under the name of Montes II—had flatly refused to go. Finding himself in this dilemma, the manager set out to find a substitute; and having heard rumours that there was a boy called Belmonte in Triana who fought with much style, he got hold of me and offered me the job. I call it a "job"; although the conditions were that I should fight according to Portuguese rules, that I should pay for the hire of my costume out of my own pocket, that I should also provide a banderillero on the same terms,

that I should receive no payment, and finally that I should have to perform not under my own name but under the name of Montes II, since the posters had already been issued. That is to say, I should receive neither money nor glory.

In spite of everything, the offer seemed tempting and I accepted it. I managed to get hold of a costume by promising to pay for the hire in instalments, and one of my friends agreed to take the job of the unpaid banderillero.

Before leaving for Elvas I had the idea of getting myself photographed in the costume; and various friends of mine also decided that it would be an opportunity to get themselves photographed as bullfighters. We struck a bargain with a street photographer, who set up his tripod in a vacant lot; this was opposite my house, where we dressed and undressed to pose for him in turn in the coveted apparel.

The procession of bullfighters who crossed the Cava in full costume at ten o'clock that morning were the delight of the quarter. My father, who was in great good humour that day, kidded us mercilessly every time we went in and out. He propped himself up in the doorway, smoking a cigarette and keeping up a running mixture of catcalls, sarcastic applause, and derisive comments which convulsed all the women of the neighbourhood who turned out to watch.

The door of my house was identical with those of three or four other houses next to it; and after one lad had been photographed and was running back across the street to take off the costume, my father slyly moved himself to the next door. Scared out of his wits by the stream of jeers that whistled around his head, the lad dashed headlong into the wrong house and straight into an old woman who was standing there in her shift hunting for fleas.

Things like that were apt to happen when my father was in form.

The time came to leave for Portugal, and my banderillero came dejectedly to tell me that he had been unable to find anyone who would rent him a costume. An old torero who lived in the Cava got us out of that difficulty.

"I've got an old costume of my own that I can lend you," he said. "It's in pretty bad condition, but it's better than nothing."

My banderillero saw the heavens open. He took the costume without even looking at it; we shoved it in the trunk, and set off for the station full of illusions.

Getting to Elvas was far from easy. Our manager, who came with us, only had enough money to pay our fares as far as Badajoz; and he was unable to pay for one of the banderilleros at all. We smuggled him on to the train and hid him under the seat; but he was discovered by the conductor, and we had to empty our own pockets to the last céntimo to save him from being handed over to the police. However, I managed to keep one peseta hidden in my shoe.

In Badajoz we were stranded. It occurred to the manager to telegraph to Elvas and suggest that it would be a good idea to send a carriage for us, because it would be a good advertisement if the cuadrillas made a spectacular entrance into the town. Elvas is hardly any distance from the frontier; but although we received a reply saying that the carriage would leave immediately to fetch us, hours went by without any sign of it. It became time for a meal, but we had no money to buy one. The famous cuadrillas from Sevilla and Triana yawned hungrily under the walls of Badajoz. I winked at my banderillero, and we detached ourselves inconspicuously from the others; with the peseta which I had saved in my shoe we bought some bread and sausage, and ate them with

great secrecy. When we rejoined the party, they somehow guessed that we had eaten. With that sharp and exquisite sense of smell which hunger gives, they even divined that we had eaten sausage. They considered that we had cheated them, and quarrelled bitterly with us. There and then began the rivalry between the two cuadrillas—the one from Triana, which had eaten sausage, and the one from Sevilla, which had not eaten.

We were almost in despair when the carriage from Elvas at last appeared. The man who had come to fetch us said that he had spent several hours searching for us all over Badajoz; but he was expecting to find us dressed as bullfighters, and although he had actually passed us two or three times it hadn't occurred to him that those poor devils who were gaping with hunger on the benches by the roadside could be the gallant Spanish toreros.

In Elvas they took us straight to the inn and showed us into a large dining-room where, at a table promisingly laid for a banquet, the impresario formally proceeded to welcome us. Very solemnly and very eloquently, he expressed his hope that we would achieve resounding triumphs, and sang the glories of Spanish bullfighting in a spirited discourse which seemed as if it would never end. While he was talking, the brave gladiators edged up closer to the table and got hold of the rolls and gobbled them up in the twinkling of an eye, meanwhile nodding their courteous agreement with the loquacious impresario's oration. When at last the speeches and presentations were over and the waiters brought in the soup, the landlord was startled to discover that not a single roll remained on the table. We ate like starving animals. It must have made a shocking impression. Anyway, the landlord, as a precaution, moved us out into a sort of large summer-house which formed an annexe to the inn, where they put up our beds and brought us

our subsequent meals in carefully measured rations.

When my banderillero unpacked his borrowed costume, the roof blew off the summer-house. No one could have appeared in the ring in those rags. It was a black costume that must have dated back to the Flood. The coat was stained and discoloured, and most of the braid had been torn off; there were holes in the jacket where the cloth was missing as well as the trimmings; and the padding was unashamedly coming out of the shoulders.

"You can't fight like that," I told him. "You look like a scarecrow."

"What about yourself?" he retorted.

I looked at myself. Perhaps I was a little better than he was, but I certainly wasn't presentable. Nothing fitted me—not the coat, not the waistcoat, not even the shoes. My banderillero was a frail thin boy, and I myself was nothing to look at. With our lack of presence and our ancient costumes we were a miserable contrast to the other cuadrilla, who were smart, well-dressed, and well-set-up young fellows. We mended my banderillero's costume as best we could, and painted the places where the lining showed through with ink to make it match the rest of the material. This worked fairly well, except that when he sweated during the fight the ink ran and stained his body all over. But as soon as we came out into the arena the spectators observed the difference between the two teams—the one from Sevilla, which was nicely dressed, and the one from Triana, which looked as if it had just been dug up.

Montes II—that is to say, myself—was solemnly committed to perform a trick which is very popular with the Portuguese. He had to place banderillas "*a porta gayola*." The obligation was serious, because in Portuguese bullfights the tricks which each bullfighter is to perform are previously announced on the posters. I

had never heard of this trick; but our manager, who had also appointed himself director of the spectacle, promised to show me. Before the bull came out, he placed me in the centre of the arena facing the pen with the banderillas in my hand. I wasn't so sure about that; and since the bull did not appear at once I started to edge obliquely away towards the side of the ring, where I thought I would have a better chance of placing the banderillas. The public observed my cautious manœuvre and started a frightful uproar. The door of the pen was closed again so that the bull shouldn't come out while I was not in the required position, and again the director placed me firmly in the centre of the ring. Again I sneaked off towards the barrera, and the shouting and booing was terrific. Eventually I did place the banderillas—not a *porta gayola*, as they wanted me to, but simply as best I could. My reputation promptly sank to zero.

Later on, however, the situation changed. The points of the bulls' horns were padded, in the Portuguese style, but one of them managed to land a blow in the eye of the chief of the Sevilla cuadrilla which was sufficiently serious to send him to the infirmary. As there was nobody else to take his place, I was left sole master of the arena. I stopped worrying about the Portuguese tastes, and even managed to forget the shabbiness of my costume; and since the bulls were brave I set out to fight with all my soul, and gave the public the best I had. I ended up by earning their loud and enthusiastic applause, having proved that smart clothes were not everything.

I returned to Sevilla as the hero of our party, but without a céntimo in my pockets. All I ever got out of that fight, in which I wore a bullfighter's costume for the first time, was the memory of those miraculously vanishing rolls at the inn, and an endless



"I did my verónicas and media verónicas standing very close and with my hands very low, as we used to do in the country."

"I was in ecstasy. I watched it in amazement as it crumpled up and died there without another touch."



dunning from the owner of the costume, who came every week to collect his two pesetas.

16

There was a capea at Zalamea la Real, and nine or ten of us went there from Triana.

Aficionados had collected there from all over the place, and the town was swarming with them. As soon as we arrived we were bluntly informed that we should not be allowed to fight. The capea had been organised by the lads of the village for their own benefit, and they wanted no outside assistance. Since we had come there to fight, we decided to jump into the ring whether they liked it or not; but the commandant of the Guardia Civil, who was presiding over the event, ordered the first outsider who jumped into the ring to be arrested. Nevertheless we jumped in one after another, and one after another we were rounded up and taken to the balcony where the commandant was enthroned. For the time being the punishment consisted of nothing worse than giving us a better view of the capea; but when it was over the commandant turned to us and said without rancour, but in a tone that left no room for misunderstanding:

"I warned you that anyone who tried to butt in would be punished. I don't want to make things worse for you by having you marched through the streets like criminals, so I'm going to let you go to the prison by yourselves. You will report there within half an hour. Is that understood?"

We gave him our word and thanked him for his consideration, and with that we set off. I went up to one of the natives and asked

the way to the lock-up, but my companions took my arm and tried to drag me away.

"You're not really going to the prison by yourself, are you?"

"Don't be such a fool!"

"The commandant only said that to give us a chance to get away."

I listened to them uncomprehendingly. Hadn't we given our word that we would report at the lock-up by ourselves to escape the ignominy of being dragged through the streets like petty thieves? What else could we do but go?

I couldn't convince anyone; neither could they convince me. I firmly believed that when anyone treated you well, the least you could do was to show your gratitude by keeping faith with him. Our lawlessness and defiance could be kept for the occasions when we were the victims of injustice.

I went alone to the lock-up and presented myself to the jailer.

"What do you want?" he inquired.

"I want to be imprisoned," I said, and explained to him what had happened.

"Come in," he replied, and opened the door for me with the greatest courtesy.

The key turned in the lock again, and there I was, dutifully serving my sentence. I got bored after a while. Fortunately, the lock-up wasn't such a terrible dungeon; it even had a small window from which one could look out into the street, and there I stood watching the people pass. After three or four hours a friend of mine happened to come by and saw me.

"What are you doing there?"

"I'm a convict."

I asked him to take advantage of his freedom to put in a word

for me, and shortly afterwards the jailer was ordered to turn me loose again. I left the prison highly satisfied with my conscientiousness.

17

Calderón continued to sing my praises, until even his friends began to pull his leg about the exorbitant enthusiasm with which he talked about that boy Belmonte whom nobody knew. One evening he took me along to introduce me to some good *aficionados* who used to meet and talk about bulls at a cabstand near the Arenal under the shadow of the Golden Tower. Among the members of this circle were the Cerveras, who owned the stand, the brothers Paco and Daniel Herrera, an old *picador** nicknamed Zalea, another retired *picador* called Velilla who had been a member of Mazzantini's *cuadrilla*, and various others.

I don't know how they survived the shock. I didn't look like a phenomenon. I was weedy and dull-looking, awkward and ill at ease, in every possible way the reverse of a brilliant sight. After Calderón's fantastic exaggerations the contrast must have been grotesque, and doubtless they put me down as a mere product of the *banderillero's* uncontrollable imagination. On the other hand, I was so insignificant and humble and inarticulate that they probably decided I was more to be pitied than laughed at; and so, partly out of pity and partly to have the joke back on Calderón, they kept up the pretence of regarding me as a bullfighting phenomenon. Half seriously and half in jest, they would frequently talk about my

* One of the men mounted on horseback and armed with a lance—there are two in each *cuadrilla*—who plays an important part in tiring the bull.

future, until they really began to feel that they had adopted me.

Apart from this difficult life which Calderón thrust upon me, I continued my adventures with the gang in the enclosures of Tablada and in other capeas. We also took to going to the Conradi pasture in Almensilla. We could fight there as much as we liked during the night, because the corral was in the centre of the pasture and a long way from where the guards lived. The only inconvenience was that it was a long way from Sevilla, and we had to spend the whole night and early morning on the road. When we tramped home at dawn we were worn out and starving. The appetite which we acquired on those excursions was astounding. On the way back we talked of nothing but meals, and used our imaginations to conjure up visions of Pantagruelian feasts. One of us said that his dream was to find a well full of chocolate, where he would sit down on the edge and spend his life dunking biscuits as big as billiard tables in it; another imagined torrential rivers of soup, and mountains of fried fish so lofty that they made him dizzy to think about. I think we were half delirious with hunger. One early morning we were so desperately famished that we got into an orchard and attacked the fruit under the very nose of the guard, and stuffed our pockets with it while we dared him to shoot at us.

When I got home, of course, the spectre of our hopeless poverty rose up again to mock me. By that time my father had had all the fight taken out of him; he had sunk into a rut from which he was unable to do any more to help us. The only ray of hope I could see came from bullfighting. Why couldn't I be a torero? I wasn't afraid of bulls. One night I saw Rodolfo Gaona getting into a sleeping car at the station. He was surrounded by smart young men and pretty girls. I stood up on tiptoe to peep into the window of his compartment, and feasted my eyes on the soft and shining and

luxuriously comfortable interior. The comparison only depressed me more.

I went back to Calderón's friends at the Arenal and implored them by all the saints in heaven to get me a chance to fight. The Herreras took me to the *Café de la Perla*, which was the meeting-place of many influential *aficionados*. There I met Benjumea Zayas, Oliva, and other landowners of El Arahál who had built a bullring in that town and were organising a *corrida* to inaugurate it. They were very good to me, and decided that I should inaugurate the ring by killing two novillos.

At last!

A mixed *corrida* was arranged: I was to play four *becerros* with the cape and kill two novillos without picadors. I was going to kill bulls for the first time in my life.

It was the 24th of July, 1910. The annual fair was in full swing, and the new bullring was packed to overflowing. The novillos from the ranch of Pérez de Coria which I had to fight and kill, although they weren't of pure fighting stock, attacked well from the start, and my work on the first one with the cape earned me a round of applause. When I took over the muleta and the sword I was ready to put everything I had into it. I fought so close to the bull that in one pass it caught me in the forehead with its horn and split my eyebrow. The blood poured out, blinding me and staining my hands and shirt-front. I put a hand to my forehead and felt a rag of flesh hanging down over my eye.

I was seized with a kind of frenzy. I went towards the bull, blinded with rage and blood, got it into position, and poised myself. Hardly able to see the spot that I had to aim for through the warm red curtain that covered half my face, I plunged forward and felt the steel bury itself audibly in the animal's flesh. When I

realised that the bull, with its feet spread wide apart, was sinking to the ground with the sword buried up to the hilt between its shoulder-blades, I was in ecstasy.

I watched it in amazement as it crumpled up and died there without another touch; and simultaneously, through the dazed buzzing of my head, a confused noise like a distant tempest penetrated into my ears. I felt the blood dripping rhythmically down my cheek as the tumult grew louder and nearer. They were applauding me!

I raised my head. I pushed back the strip of flesh that was hanging over my eye and managed to smile at the crowd. No ovation has ever thrilled me so much.

Then they took me to the infirmary, and since I was the only torero the fight was suspended while I was being treated.

I fell into the hands of a slap-dash surgeon who produced a new technique for disinfecting the wound. He sent for a bottle of mineral water, took a large mouthful of it, and squirted it in my face. After spraying the wound and me several times with this sweet and sticky fluid mixed with his own saliva, he considered that the disinfection was complete and proceeded with the operation. He took a thick sailmaker's needle, replaced the torn piece of skin, and stitched the edges together as if he had been sewing up a sack. It left me with an unnecessary scar that I shall carry for the rest of my life.

Then they bandaged me hurriedly and rushed me back to the ring, because the public were getting impatient. I was rather sick with pain. Nevertheless I fought as well as I could, and again I received an ovation.

But the time came for the second kill, and the illusions which had filled me when I saw the first bull drop dead rapidly vanished. It

was not so easy to make a kill as I had believed. This other bull seemed to be made of rubber. I stabbed it in every part of its body except the right one; and although it is true that there did come a time when it died, I believe that it was more from boredom with me and my clumsiness than from any lethal action of my sword.

18

As I had no decent clothes, a friend in Triana had lent me a new suit so that I wouldn't make too bad an impression at El Arahal. When the corrida was over, I went in my new suit to the casino, where I was introduced to a Cuban gentleman who congratulated me on my courage and rewarded it with the largest cigar I have ever seen in my life.

When I returned to Sevilla that night, it seemed to me that it would be a good idea to cut a dash with that large cigar and my friend's new suit at the feast of Santa Ana, which was celebrated in Triana the following day. It was a typical festival of the quarter, and I was very keen to show myself off at it. I had twentyfive pesetas which I had been paid before I went to Arahal, and to make sure that I shouldn't spend them I had hidden them in a box of candles on the mantelpiece in my house.

With my new suit, my enormous cigar, my twentyfive-peseta note in my wallet, and my head proudly bandaged from an authentic goring, I was the king of the fiesta. I was sitting at a refreshment kiosk with the cigar in my mouth and my chest expanded when some girls came by who were out on the warpath. Giving myself all the airs of a plutocratic torero, I took them to a gipsy *buñolería* and stood them chocolate and sweet batter cakes and *aguardiente*. When

the time came to pay, I called the gipsy woman and handed her the twentyfive-peseta note with a lordly gesture.

It came back like a boomerang. It was a dud. The woman began to make a scene, the girls slunk sheepishly away, and I was left in a pitiful predicament because that was the only money I had. The row was colossal. The only way I could placate her was by offering to pay her bit by bit in goods from my father's stall. And that's how I did pay her. Whenever my father was not there the gipsy woman would come along, and for days afterwards I had to give her enough pieces of lace and embroidered edging to buy her whole *buñolera*.

On the other hand, my conscience has never pricked me, because—as I learned long afterwards—it was my father himself who had found my note by accident and changed it for the dud. He didn't know how much the joke was going to cost him.

To put the finishing touch to the tragedy, when I had finally succeeded in soothing the gipsy with my promises and had settled down to resume my swanking with the enormous cigar, the owner of the suit arrived in his shirt-sleeves at the end of a frantic search for me and almost stripped me naked on the spot.

I threw away the end of the cigar and resignedly went home to undress and go to bed. It was the end of my glory.

Guareña is a horrible town. I don't advise anybody to go there. I went there once and I never want to go there again.

There arrived in Sevilla an impresario from Guareña who was looking for toreros for a bullfight that was to be held there. He was a

shady customer, and the young bullfighters in Sevilla knew him well. An old horse-dealer by origin, he treated his toreros much the same as the mules which he used to buy in the markets, and nobody wanted to have anything to do with him. After hunting bullfighters in vain through all the cafés of Sevilla he heard about me; and I was so anxious to fight, under whatever conditions it might be, that I accepted his proposition. He also signed Paco Madrid, who lived in Triana not far from my house. Between the two of us we were to kill four gigantic bulls left over from the year before, which this sharper had bought for no more than their value as meat.

Calderón, who had no engagements at that time, offered to come with us, more to keep an eye on the impresario than to get familiar with those overgrown bulls.

"So long as I'm with you," he said boastfully, "that shark won't get away with any funny business."

A frequent member of our San Jacinto parties was a fat fellow with a comical lisp who more than anything else in the world wanted to be a picador. He was a carter in the Barranco fish market; and since he sometimes presented us with a fine parcel of fish we were all in favour of his ambition, and once even promised him that when I was a real torero he should be a picador in my cuadrilla. However, when the contract for Guareña was signed, somebody else got in ahead of him and secured the job. When our friend discovered that he had missed his chance, he came disconsolately to see me and said that he was ready to go without payment and would even put up the price of his own fare. So we let him come along. To pay for his ticket he had to pawn his double bed and leave his unfortunate wife sleeping on the floor.

When we got to Guareña and saw the bulls, everything that we

had been told about them paled before the reality. They were four mammoths of nearly fourteen hundred pounds each, and on top of that three of them were blind in one eye. There were only two or three miserable little horses to punish them with; and Calderón, on this and other pretexts which his experienced wiliness suggested to him, threatened that we should refuse to fight at all unless they made us certain definite concessions. What he was really aiming at was to get them to pay us some money in advance, because otherwise it was highly problematical whether we should ever collect it.

The effort was useless. The impresario refused to disgorge a penny, and Calderón wouldn't yield an inch.

"We won't fight, even if the Guardia Civil drag us to the ring," was his ultimatum.

The time for the *corrida* drew nearer, and in view of our attitude the municipal authorities intervened. They put the impresario on one side; and the mayor, the judge, and various other important people tried to talk Calderón round. A long-winded and laborious conference got under way. Meanwhile the populace, not knowing whether the *corrida* was going to take place or not, was milling rowdily around the bullring. Calderón went in and out of our room with orders and counter-orders.

"Get yourselves dressed. We're going to the ring."

In five minutes he would come back.

"Take your clothes off. We're not going to fight."

I got tired of this suspense, left my costume on a chair, and went for a walk through the town. The infuriated public was on the point of starting a riot. Half an hour after the *corrida* was supposed to have started, I saw poor old Calderón coming in search of me with three *guardias civiles* round him.

"They're going to make us fight," he said, indicating his escort with a tragic gesture. "They're taking us to the slaughter-house!"

They put us in a carriage and took us back to the inn to change. Calderón was so frightened that he could hardly get into his costume. Nervous and upset, he tried in vain to fasten the sash round his waist, meanwhile keeping up a flow of bitter reflections and lugubrious reminiscences.

"Bulls from this ranch," he muttered pessimistically, "put an end to So-and-so's bullfighting. They gored Whatsisname, and ripped his tripes out. They left Thingummybob six months in hospital, half-way between life and death . . ."

Calderón's panic relieved some of my own. I finished my own dressing and joked with him while I helped him with his. We were marched through the streets to the bullring in full costume, surrounded by armed guards, and the howls and yells of the spectators when we did finally appear in the arena were ear-splitting. When the corrida started I was more frightened of the audience than I was of the bulls.

The first bull to come out was a huge beast with enormous horns; but contrary to our expectations it turned out to be brave and energetic. When it attacked the picadors they were not quick enough with their lances; and in a second, with two lightning rushes, it had the two horses belly upwards and was goring them furiously. The horses, the picadors, and an attendant who had been caught in the eruption formed a ghastly tangle which the bull ripped at again and again with its enormous horns. The butchery was horrible. We were paralysed with terror. Nobody knew what to do. The first man who detached himself from that shapeless and gory maelstrom of flesh was our friend the carter from the fish

market, his face and hands streaming with blood, who galloped on all fours towards the barrera with an agility of which one would never have believed him capable.

This disastrous beginning had its natural result. Nobody felt like getting close to the bull. I made the best of the situation, opened my cape, and gave it a few passes as well as I could. There were no more horses and therefore no more *quites*,* and when the time came for the kill the bull was as sound and strong as when it entered the ring. I gave it nine or ten passes with the muleta, and was lucky enough to catch it with a shallow thrust which dropped it. But the second bull to come out was horribly squint-eyed and proved wilder and more difficult. Since there were no more picadors, our banderilleros tried to punish it to some extent by stabbing it from the barrera whenever they had the chance. The public was ready to lynch us. I feigned a *quite*, and as I was making a *media verónica* the bull caught me and gored me in the leg.

They took me to the infirmary, which was really only a stable, and put me on a camp bed to attend to me. They had scarcely started to loosen my clothes when Paco Madrid was brought in with a wound in his arm. He also was deposited on the camp bed, which was the only one there was; and they were starting to look after us both when Calderón appeared, also wounded in the arm. And that was the end of the corrida. All three of us were piled into the tottering bed, and from there we heard the howling of the enraged multitude. Paco Madrid was cursing, Calderón was wailing, and I was yelling for somebody to look after us; and under

* Any manœuvre by which a bull is taken away from a fallen horse or man; but usually, from the nature of the situation, involving a definite display of valour by the man who performs it. Apart from using the cape, a torero may seize the bull by the tail or even by the horns.

the strain of our arguing and jumping about the bed gave way and deposited us all on the floor with a bone-shattering thud. Another banderillero, wounded both in the leg and the arm at the same time, arrived to add himself to this scrambling heap of injured toreros; and meanwhile the public was threatening to set fire to the bullring and the Guardia Civil were shooting the bull which we had been unable to kill.

When things had finally quieted down a bit they took us back to the inn, but the landlord told us that he wanted nothing more to do with us. Nobody had paid us a céntimo. I set out to walk towards the station, limping painfully, and leaning on our unfortunate amateur picador, who was moaning about his bruises and bewailing the insanity that had made him leave his good wife sleeping on the floor in order to come with us on such a disastrous adventure.

At the station I sat on a bench and waited for the arrival of the train. As the time drew near, a fellow with the air of a young bullfighter dashed on to the platform and came towards me as soon as he caught sight of me. He took me quickly by the arm as if he had been a lifelong friend.

"Don't say anything," he hissed in my ear. "Whatever happens, keep your mouth shut."

A few minutes later a pair of *guardias civiles* arrived and posted themselves at the entrance to the platform, while an officer who came after them walked on and questioned the people who were waiting for the train. Some of them were taken into a corner and searched. When the officer came towards where I was, my unknown friend said to me loudly:

"Come on, old man. Pull yourself together if you can. The officer wants to talk to us."

I tried to move, and let out a groan.

"The poor fellow's been badly gored," explained my mysterious companion. "That's what you get for being a bullfighter."

The officer recognised me as the unfortunate matador of that afternoon. He looked at my companion. Under the tilted cap showed the end of a pigtail.

"That's all right," said the officer. "We're not looking for you."

He moved on, and at that moment the train came in. The stranger picked me up in his arms and hoisted me into a carriage with the greatest care. In the corridor I met Calderón and the other toreros, who told me that a frantic hue and cry had been raised because a pickpocket had stolen the impresario's wallet with all the money he had received for the corrida.

"It's the best news I ever heard," said Calderón. "Apparently there is still some justice in the world."

I went to look for my good Samaritan. The train had already started, and he seemed quite unconcerned.

"You're the fellow who pulled that trick, aren't you?" I said.

"It didn't do you any harm," he replied unabashed.

"But you're not a bullfighter?"

"No, but I wear the pigtail because it's a good line. People always have a soft spot for a young bullfighter. They're sorry for him, but they don't believe he would do anything crooked."

I turned my back on him disgustedly and went back to tell Calderón what had happened. Calderón clapped a hand to his head.

"Didn't I tell you there was justice?" he cried. "He shall pay us some of the money that we didn't get out of the impresario. It's our money, and I refuse to let him steal it."

He went in search of the pickpocket and had words with him.

I don't know what the words were, but they resulted in Calderón's triumphant return with a fistful of money which he had somehow persuaded the man to hand over to him.

"That pig thought we were going to work for nothing," said Calderón magnificently. "But there is still justice in the world!"

20

My wound from Guareña was almost closed when I met Riverito one evening and he suggested that we should go to Tablada that night. We went alone, and found no bulls in the corral; but we did come across two horses which had been turned out to graze, so we decided to borrow these to continue our search over the pasture. We improvised bridles by tying one coat-sleeve round the horse's nose and using the other sleeve as a rein.

We did meet a young cow that seemed promising, and tried to work it into a corner; but with the movement of the horse my wound had opened and begun to bleed. While Riverito was galloping after the cow, I fell behind until I lost sight of him. I went on more slowly for a long time trying to find him, holding my wound together with one hand so as not to bleed to death. I was afraid that at any moment I might faint and fall senseless in some hollow where no one would ever find me in time. I was also afraid that something might have happened to Riverito; and then suddenly I saw some bulky shapes lying on the ground among the cactus bushes, and heard Riverito's voice calling me faintly.

The horse he was riding and the cow he was chasing had somehow managed to collide, and the three of them had spilled over in

a heap. The cow had fallen in an awkward position from which it was unable to get up, and Riverito was pinned under the horse with one arm dislocated, struggling helplessly to get free.

I dismounted and limped laboriously over to help my companion, who was panting and cursing and foaming at the mouth; but I had hardly started towards him when he shouted:

"The cow! The cow! Never mind me. Don't let the cow get away!"

I got hold of the cow by the horns and held its head down until Riverito was able to free himself and get his breath. Then he held the cow down while I tried to do something about my leg. Taking it in turns, we managed to keep it there until we had patched ourselves up sufficiently to be able to play it. And we did play it. We had earned that.

Since I had shown my courage at El Arahál, Calderón's friends did not desert me: Daniel Herrera bought me a suit, and they took me to a party at the Café la Perla. There I met other influential gentlemen, among them Don Carlos Vázquez, who recommended me to the management of the Sevilla bullring. The management itself didn't offer me a contract; but towards the month of August my friends managed to get me into a novillada without picadors, organised by a casual impresario who took the ring on his own account when the management was not giving corridas. I fought in Sevilla for the first time with Bombita IV and Pilón. I think I did well; the *aficionados* who afterwards carried me shoulder-high to my house must have thought so too; but the trouble is that it

had no effects. None of the critics wrote about my work, and the impresario didn't feel called upon to give me any money. My contract had been made with the promise that if he made money on the fight he would make me some present; but when I asked him about it he told me that he had just broken even and had nothing to spare for me.

However, the corrida did raise my stock among the *aficionados* of Triana. Suddenly I realised that I was the centre of our group, the most important personage in the gang. Anything I said suddenly took on an importance which it had never had before. We were the same as before, we talked about the same things, apparently we had the same attitude towards one another; but they listened to me, and in the end usually did what I said. I began to hear that flattering undercurrent of "Juan said . . .", "Juan doesn't like . . .", which it took me a long time to get accustomed to.

Also I began to notice that I had new friends. I was beginning to acquire the satellites who gather round a coming torero in the same way that they gather round coming politicians when it is rumoured that there is going to be a change of power. They were friends who accompanied me wherever I went, laughed at my jokes, and only left me in the small hours of the morning when I said goodnight to them on my doorstep.

This was only in the little world of Triana where I had always moved. My fame reached no further than the Altozano. The Sevilla management still declined to give me a contract, and it was not until the end of the season that I managed to get a contract to fight at Constantina. Since he thought I had a position to keep up, my patron, Daniel Herrera, made it a condition that they should pay me more than they paid the other bullfighter.

It was a triumph of commercial acumen. They paid the other novillero twentyfour duros, and gave me twentyfive. After paying my cuadrilla, the hire of my costume, and the expenses, I had four pesetas left. Still, I couldn't complain, because they contracted me for the first corrida of the following year, which was to take place on Resurrection Day.

At last I could call myself a professional bullfighter. I began to put on airs. And I fell in love.

22

I fell in love with a married woman, pretty and temperamental and an adept in the arts of pleasure. It was a revelation for me. Until then, my amorous experience had been limited to the jasmine-scented maidens of Triana and the street angels who prowled up and down the Paseo Cristina.

Those girls of Triana, who wanted to marry me and tried to make me give up bullfighting and talk seriously with their parents, never roused me to great enthusiasm. I never interviewed any of their fathers; and since this was an indispensable preliminary to any revelation of their sentiments, I never discovered what their love was like. One might find a spark of passion in their eyes, but it never dared to burst into flame. I was just a budding bullfighter, without fame and without means, and any woman who looked at me would only have lost caste. They liked me well enough, but the cautious conservatism of Sevillian tradition barred me from their intimacy. Perhaps some of them would have been capable of making me fall in love with them, but their egotism and terror

of other people's opinions, their slavery to the existing prejudice against toreros, kept me at arm's length.

So when I met this married woman who was ready to risk her security and reputation for love of a nameless and penniless torero, it affected me so deeply as to change the whole trend of my life. I ceased to be obsessed with bullfighting, and lived only for this new and absorbing infatuation. To this love I gave all the enthusiasm of which I was capable. Perhaps for the first time in my life I relaxed. I was liberated for a little while from the merciless drive of my old restless ambitions. I closed my eyes and let myself slip down the pleasant and gentle slopes of love. Why not? I had a future as a torero. I had a woman who loved me. What did anything else matter?

Calderón, the seasoned veteran, became the voice of conscience. He saw clearly that success was within my grasp, and watched over me as jealously as if I was something of his own creation.

At six o'clock in the morning he arrived at my house and dragged me out of bed to put me through a course of training which he considered essential for success in bullfighting. I didn't dare to confess that when he came to call me it was only a couple of hours since I had crept into bed after spending the night in the sweet indulgence of my love. Half asleep, with rings under my eyes and my whole body limp with an unconquerable lassitude, I had to set out to stagger after the tireless Calderón on tremendous treks which were supposed to strengthen me and actually only exhausted what little strength I had left. We would tramp out to Castilleja or San Juan de Aznalfarache, and there Calderón made me do knee-bends and jumps until I fell down exhausted. It also occurred to him that to be able to kill bulls well I must build up my arm, so he made me carry in my right hand a huge loaded stick that must

have weighed a ton. That awful stick almost pulled my arm out of its socket, but although I kept trying to lose it Calderón always managed to find it again. The training would have been perfect if it had been combined with a reasonable diet and a sufficient amount of sleep; but there was hardly any food at home and my nights were given up to anything but rest.

In that condition I set out to fight in Sevilla.

It was a novillada in which Pacorro was to play two becerros; after which there were four novillos for formal combat, two of which I had to kill.

The two bulls which fell to me were big and clumsy and difficult to play, and the little energy which I had left was all used up on the first one. They gave me two *avisos*,* and the public booed me to the skies; but somehow or other I managed to get rid of it.

But the second bull came out, a big animal with very erect and wide-open horns, and to make that worse it had no spirit for the fight. As soon as I had given it one pass with the cape it ran away, and I had to chase it all round the ring. By the time I took over the sword and muleta I was exhausted. At the first pass it ran away again. I folded the muleta and set off after it with my tongue hanging out. I had to chase it twice round the ring, and my lungs were bursting by the time I caught it up. When it did stop at last and I spread the muleta before it, it charged once and ran away again. I felt I was going to die. After chasing it for a few more miles I caught it again, and without even getting it into

* *Avisos* are given by trumpet at the discretion of the president on the advice of an *asesor* who is an experienced judge of bullfighting. They mark the regular steps through which a bullfight has to pass. There is an *aviso* for the picadors to be brought on, an *aviso* for the *banderillas*, and an *aviso* for the kill. If the *matador* fails to complete the kill in a reasonably short time after that, a second *aviso* is given. If a third *aviso* is given the bullfighter is considered to have failed, and steers are sent into the arena to lead out the bull.

position I tried to kill it on the spot. Of course, its head was up in the clouds, and even if I stood on tiptoe I couldn't see the place where I had to put the sword. I dived in to kill as if I were diving into the sea. It jerked up its head and hurled me to the ground.

I closed my eyes and curled up where I lay. Some seconds passed—I don't know how many. I wondered what was happening. Surely, I decided, the others hadn't been able to take it away yet. I continued to lie there with my eyes shut. How beautiful it was to lie down! At least I had a chance to breathe. When at last they lured the bull away, Calderón lifted me up and asked anxiously if I was hurt. No, I wasn't—unfortunately.

"Then get going," he said, and put the sword and muleta back in my hands.

Again I chased the bull, until I felt as if my lungs were in ribbons. Again I hurled myself in for the kill, and again it caught me between its horns and flung me to the ground.

"Not so bad," I thought. "All the time I'm lying here I don't have to keep running."

But in a few seconds Calderón was there again, to pick me up like a wet rag and give me the sword again.

The third time I got in front of the bull I was so desperate that when I went in to kill I threw myself bodily over its horns with the idea that if I didn't kill it then, it might at least kill me. Anything would have been preferable to the torture I was going through. But it didn't. Once again I sailed through the air and fell at its feet. I had already learnt by experience that if I lay still it wouldn't attack me again, and it was so lovely to relax there with the bull standing over me like a guardian angel.

"If only I could sleep," I thought. "Just for a little while . . ."

But again the relentless Calderón arrived, this time thoroughly annoyed with me.

"What do you think you're doing there? Get up!"

"I can't, Calderón," I groaned.

"That's what you get for the sort of life you lead. Come on, get up! If you can stay up all night you can stay up some of the afternoon——"

The public began to get amused at the spectacle. One spectator has since told me that it seemed as if I were a mechanical doll which Calderón kept winding up and putting on its feet to send it after the bull.

I tried to make the kill about a hundred times, the bull caught me fifteen or twenty; and when the patience of the president and the public was exhausted and the trumpets were sounded for the steers, the bull was as much alive as when the fight began.

The bull had just tossed me for the twentieth time when I heard the sound of the third aviso. I was suddenly seized with an uncontrollable rage and desperation. I gathered every shred of strength I had left and somehow overcame my exhaustion enough to make one leap that placed me in front of the bull. Without sword or muleta, which had been no use to me, I threw myself on my knees in front of it and defied it like a lunatic.

"Kill me!" I screamed. "Kill me, damn you!"

I was blind with despair. I crawled up to the bull on my knees until I was almost underneath it. I caught it by the horns, spat at it, hit at its face with my bare hands, while I went on sobbing in a kind of delirium: "Kill me, then . . . Kill me, damn you . . . kill me!"

Calderón and the *mozo de espadas* tried to drag me away. There is a photograph in existence which caught the scene. The *mozo*

de espadas is pulling my arm and Calderón has grabbed me by the scruff of the neck while I am still on my knees between the horns of the bull, which I suppose only refrained from killing me because it didn't want to.

23

It was soon brought home to me that my failure in Sevilla was the ruin of all my illusions. Everyone turned against me—my protectors, my friends, and even my family. I was discredited. I had nothing left in the world except the love for which I had sacrificed everything.

If I had resigned myself to fate I should soon have become just another of the world's might-have-beens; but I still had courage. I put aside my dreams of bullfighting and set to work with genuine enthusiasm. Since I had no technical training of any kind, I had to enlist as a day labourer in the hardest work that there was in Sevilla. They were cutting a channel to change the course of the Guadalquivir, and there I managed to find a humble job pumping air down to a diver who was working at the bottom of the river. This gigantic project gave employment to all the down-and-outs of Sevilla, if you can judge by the fact that every Sevillian workman I have since met remembers being a mate of mine in the *Tablada* cut.

But at that time I had few companions and no friends. I was in no mood for those things. I buried myself blindly in my work, and thought of nothing but collecting my pay and taking it to my stepmother to alleviate the misery of my home. I wore any old rags I could find, I didn't smoke or drink, and I had no other

diversion or happiness than the love of that wonderful woman who stood by me without regard for my vanished glory. That winter tested my will-power to the limit.

The spring came round, and with it a reawakening of the old fascination of bullfighting. The pasture was close to where I was working; and many evenings after the day's labour was finished I would set off into the country to get my hand in again. And always, while I was citing a bull with my workman's blouse, and feeling it pass me again and again so close that its horns grazed my skin, I would be thinking: "I'm not afraid. The bulls don't frighten me. Why can't I be a bullfighter?"

One evening I was fighting in Tablada close to the river bank: I had swum across the stream, and I was fighting completely naked. Some girls who were walking along the other bank waved to me cheerfully. I had managed to corner a becerro, and when I realised that I was being watched from a distance by that party of girls I set out to fight with all the style and valour that I could command. In one pass the becerro brushed by me so close that it struck me in the face with one horn and split my lip, bowling me over. I was on my feet again by the time the shriek of terror from my audience on the other bank reached my ears. The wound was slight, but like any wound in the face it was bleeding profusely. I realised that it was nothing to worry about, and let the blood run down my body while I went on playing the bull. I didn't want to look foolish to those girls who had just been so thrilled to see me fighting naked and all alone in the field. But when they saw the blood on my body they were terrified. Some of them covered their faces so as not to see any more, others came down to the edge of the water and screamed imploringly for me to come away, and the rest simply turned and ran. My audience was broken up; but they

took blood-curdling tales back to Triana of a strange boy who fought bulls alone and naked in the pasture with his body bathed in blood.

The bullfighting season opened, and nobody remembered me. I was nothing but a common labourer toiling like an ant in the Cyclopean undertaking which broke the bodies of a generation of Sevillian workmen. Still something kept my ambition alive. At the end of the day I was worn out, and yet I was able to find strength enough to tramp on into the corrals and fight bulls. On many nights I hadn't enough time or strength left over at the end of it to go home and sleep, and after exhausting myself with fighting until the small hours of the morning I would throw myself down by the embers of the bonfire where the night watchmen kept themselves warm beside the cut and sleep there.

I went again and again to tell people that I wanted to be a torero, that I was a torero, that I was fighting every day and that every day I was growing stronger and more skilful. They looked at me with my patched-up workman's blouse, my feet breaking through the rents in my worn-out canvas shoes, and didn't believe me. Once I went to a tentadero. They threw me out unceremoniously.

"You a torero? You look more like a beggar!"

Only Calderón's faith in me remained unshaken. After the fiasco at Sevilla I had taken my lady to an inn just outside the town, to relax my weary body and soothe my aching mind with a little of the peace and glamour which I had paid for at such a disastrous price. In this enchanted peace I had still been dogged by my inexorable conscience. My conscience, as I have said, was Calderón. As bad luck would have it, he had arrived at the same inn with some friends, and there he saw us. He came towards us with his hands on his hips and wrath in his face.

"So this is how you want to be a torero," he blared at me. "A fine little rat you are!"

Then he turned to her.

"Now I know whose fault it is that they turned the steers out on us this afternoon, God damn her!"

He went on looking at her; and she couldn't have seemed altogether bad, because while he went on abusing her for what she had done to me, he began to draw himself up and twirl his side-whiskers with his inimitable old-world swagger, and his abuse gradually became more and more diluted with flattery.

My conscience had been defeated. And he became so maudlin and adhesive that in the end it was all we could do to get rid of him.

Calderón had spoken about me to a friend of his who was an impresario in Valencia; and one day he almost knocked me over with a proposition.

"Would you like to go and fight at Valencia?"

His friend the impresario had written to him and asked him to send me. I scraped some money together and got on the train. All my luggage was tied up between the four corners of a handkerchief. I had only ten or twelve pesetas in my pocket. But in another pocket of my coat I had a treasure beyond price—a photograph of my mistress.

During the journey I kept on kissing the photograph surreptitiously and vowing desperately to make good. Since my disgrace in Sevilla I had only managed to secure one engagement, in Lorca, where I had to go under the name of another torero. It was a novillada for which the cuadrillas of Pichoco and Pepete had been contracted; Pichoco didn't want to go, and the impresario took me as a substitute on condition that I should not appear in the

announcements under my own name but under that of Pichoco. With that name I had fought at Lorca, and had endured the mortification of being carried shoulder-high from the bullring with the crowd cheering for the valiant Pichoco. Now in Valencia I might be carried shoulder-high and cheered under my own name, and I was determined to make the best of my chance. It might be the last chance I should ever be given.

In the train I met a soldier on leave, a talkative fellow who was returning to his home town. He told me that his name was also Belmonte, and, believe it or not, he turned out to be a relative of mine. On the strength of this he ate most of the sandwiches I had with me, which is what has happened with most of the unexpected relatives I have met.

I arrived in Valencia full of hope and without a céntimo. It was spring. The orange blossom was in bloom, and I was in love and eager to enjoy life, and yet I was ready to gamble my life cheerfully. Anything was better than returning to be a labourer again. I went to the Bombita Club in search of Don Vicente Calvo, who was the impresario who had written to Calderón for me. And with that my hopes tumbled down like a house of cards. I had arrived too late.

Calvo had sent for me to take the place of a novillero called El Mestizo in a corrida which had been arranged at Castellón; but after writing to Calderón he had begun to doubt whether I should arrive in time, and had contracted to substitute Torerito de Valencia. Not knowing what to do with me, Calvo suggested that I should come along as a second string; and we made the journey together. He was an original type of impresario, an attractive and likeable personality with all the characteristic boisterous cordiality of Valencia. As soon as the box office opened

he took up his position alongside, and whenever anyone came to buy a season ticket Calvo took him off and stood him a beer while he expatiated on the superlative merits of his bullfighters and his bulls.

The corrida duly took place; and Torerito de Valencia was gored by the first bull, leaving Vaquerito and me alone in the ring. From that moment I set out to try and convince Vaquerito that he would have to let me kill a bull. At first he said yes, but afterwards he kept on putting me off until I realised that he had no intention of keeping his word. When the last novillo of the afternoon came out, I ran after it as soon as it entered the ring, opened my cape, and gave it various passes with all the enthusiasm and courage of which I was capable. Later on, in the *quites*, I worked so close to the bull that the public rose to its feet and cheered me.

Those who saw that corrida said afterwards that it brought them out in a cold sweat to watch the fighting of that "shabby and weedy little boy"—meaning me. I gave them the impression that I must have been either drunk or crazy—in short, that I was simply a hare-brained lunatic playing ducks and drakes with his life without knowing what he was doing. When the time came for the kill, I asked Vaquerito to give me the sword and muleta. He objected; but in the end he went with me to petition the president to let me make the kill, although with a very bad grace. Meanwhile the public was vociferously taking part in the dispute. The blood-thirsty ones wanted me to make the kill; but the more kind-hearted ones wanted me to be saved from the consequences of my own rashness, and tried to shout down the others, considering that I was nothing but a poor suicide who was heading for a certain goring. Such was the impression that my way

of fighting had made on them. The president took the side of the kind-hearted ones and refused to let me make the kill.

I was left with an aura of recklessness which began to become the subject of endless discussions. The majority maintained that I was just a silly idiot without any fundamental comprehension of the art of bullfighting; but some *aficionados* of sound judgment asserted that my work with the cape had the hallmark of a great torero. Then and there began the famous controversy which for many years was destined to rage over my head wherever I went.

Vicente Calvo took me back with him to Valencia and promised to use his influence to try and get me a contract; and since I had no money, he recommended me to a picturesque little pension facing the bullring. The price was only two pesetas a day; and the landlady, a good woman called Doña Julia, took me in on credit, either under the delusion that one day I should be a prosperous torero or that the impresario who had introduced me was going to pay for me. The time went by without my showing any signs of blossoming into the prosperity that Vicente Calvo had prophesied for me; and since nobody paid my bill, and Doña Julia didn't want to turn me out into the street, which she ought logically to have done, she was content to let me pay for my keep by doing various odd jobs for her—an arrangement which I was only too grateful to accept.

The weeks went by, and nobody offered me a job, in spite of Vicente Calvo's recommendations. There were various novilladas without picadors, for which I was not wanted. Day after day I went on desperately begging for a contract . . . until at last they almost took my breath away by telling me that I might achieve my ambition of fighting in Valencia.

But on what conditions! It was because six bulls had been

collected in the pens that were so big, so ugly, and with such impossibly developed horns that nobody else would take them on. God knows where they had been discovered. It must have been in some archæological museum. But I was so anxious to get a fight at any cost that for eighty pesetas I undertook to kill two of these mastodons.

I hurried off to try and find someone who would rent me a costume, but there I was faced with another setback. The reputation I had earned as a determined suicide, combined with the awful aspect of the bulls which were already in the corrals, guaranteed that no bullfighters' tailor or renter of costumes would run the risk of covering my body with clothes that would certainly come back to him in ribbons. If my hide didn't matter to me, their embroidered silks mattered a lot to them.

The Saturday before the corrida arrived, and I still hadn't been able to solve the problem. That afternoon I went to the bullring once again to gaze gloomily at those hideous bulls. While I was standing there, bowed down with misery, an old banderillero came up and spoke to me. With his experience of the game, he naturally had a benevolent interest in my state of mind. I told him what had happened. I had come to Valencia to triumph, and there I was with those antediluvian freaks which would certainly make it impossible for me to do anything brilliant. I hadn't even been able to hire a costume. I had no costume, no cuadrilla, no money to pay my boarding-house bill, no friends to turn to, nothing. All I had was bulls. And what bulls!

The old banderillero took me by the arm like a father.

"See here, kid," he said kindly. "The best thing you can do is to go straight to the station and catch the first train back to Sevilla. With what you've got here"—he pointed to the bulls—

"you can't hope for anything, unless it's a horn in your belly."

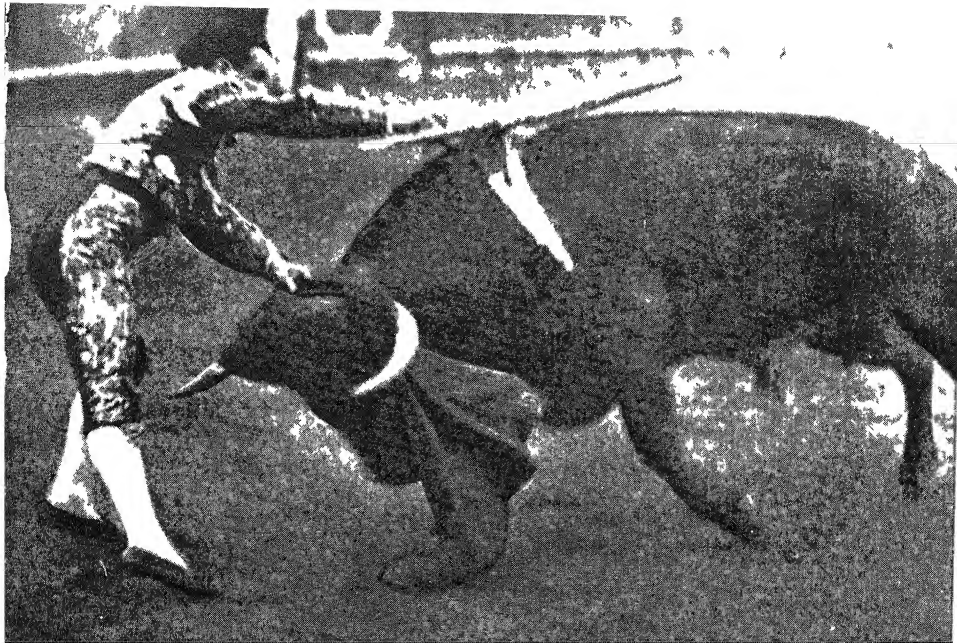
I left the corrals with no hope. On the way to the boarding-house I ran into an acquaintance; and in a moment of inspiration he suggested that we might try to find a costume in the wardrobe room of a theatre, since the people there probably wouldn't know much about bullfighting, and wouldn't have heard about my reputation as a suicide and what ferocious beasts were waiting for me at the bullring. And, in fact, that's how we did find a costume; although it was made of such flimsy silk and decorated with such impossible embroidery that I could only assume it had been made for a soubrette to sing pasodobles and wiggle her hips in. However, I took it home and tried it on. It was much as I had suspected. If I didn't have enough room in the shoulders, I had more than enough around the bottom. The seams were so fragile that they burst under the slightest strain, the sequins rained off it if you just shook it, and the tassels on the hat were sadly out of curl. Still, it was a costume. I asked for a needle and thread and tried to make the best of it. The girls of the inn took pity on my clumsiness, and helped me until they were too sleepy to go on. In the end I was left alone, stitching away by the light of a candle.

I worked like an automaton, trying to distract my thoughts from the fate that was waiting for me; but in the end I was overcome with irresistible despair. The memory of the bulls which I had to kill, the prudent advice of the old bandillero, and the realisation of the grotesqueness of those rags which I was laboriously stitching together and in which I could never look anything but ridiculous, united to convince me that I was committed to an absurd adventure which could only result in my final discredit as a torero or in a goring which would just as effectively put an end to my career.

My choice was for the goring. I worked until the small hours

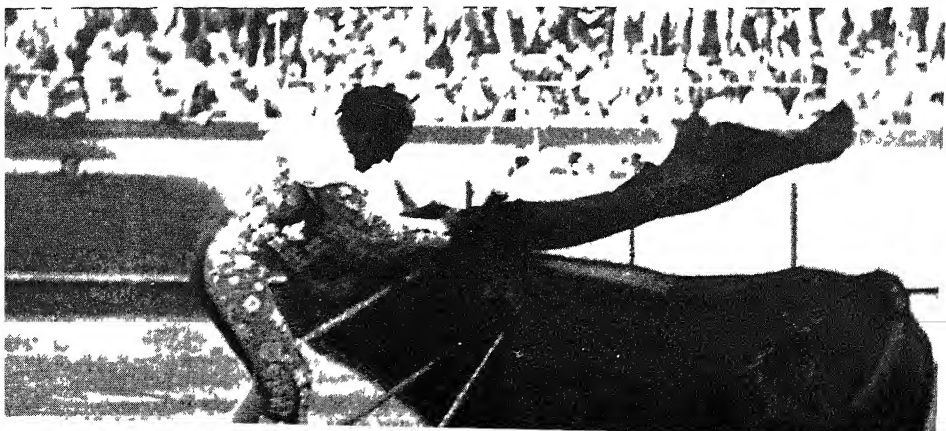
of the morning, and by that time I was inwardly resolved to die. The conviction became so vivid that I began with the greatest seriousness to set my affairs in order, as if there was no doubt that in a few hours my life would come to an end. I had a packet of letters, infinitely precious to me, that were always under my pillow when I slept; they were the impassioned letters which my mistress always wrote to me in red ink, swearing that it was her own heart's blood. I read them over again, and my heart overflowed with grief. Then I was seized with the fear that when I died those letters might fall into strange hands and compromise my darling. I burned them one by one in the flame of the candle, and glowed with pride at the thought of my own chivalrous thoughtfulness. I sat on the edge of the bed, took stock of my conscience, mentally bade farewell to my friends and relatives, laid my costume over a chair without daring to put my needlework to the test of another fitting, blew out the candle, and lay down for my last earthly sleep with a serenity of mind which even surprised myself. That afternoon I was going to die. It was ordained. . . .

That bull must have measured a yard and a half from horn to horn. Wondering how I could go in to make the kill without being gored, I trotted panting after it before the pitying eyes of thousands of Valencians. At every step I felt my jacket, wondering if it had come unsewn. How on earth was I going to finish that bull? When the chance came and I poised myself, I glanced quickly around to see if I could find any way to escape with a whole skin after the thrust. There was none. I shut my eyes and plunged after the sword with all my soul. It seemed to me that I felt the blade bury itself in the animal's flesh, but simultaneously I was caught in the stomach and flung into the air. When I came to myself



Belmonte killing *recibiendo*—a perfect *estocada*. The sword is buried up to the hilt, in exactly the place marked by the banderillas, while he brings the bull out past his right knee. (In Sevilla, on his return to the ring in 1925.)

But if he makes a mistake, this will be the result. (A picture of Belmonte's goring in Palma de Mallorca.)



An *adorno*, in a statuesque moment of classical beauty.



and found myself lying on the ground, the first thing I noticed was that the sword was still gripped in my hand.

I got up thinking that I should never manage to kill the bull, and convinced that I was doomed to make the same exhibition of myself as I had done in Sevilla. I picked up the muleta again, resolved to continue the unequal battle even though I knew I could never win; and then to my amazement I saw that the immense bulk was swaying, going down like a sinking ship. . . . I saw that its head was bowed, its feet spread wide. . . . It stepped back a little . . . and then, as if it had been struck by lightning, it fell . . . !

Never in my life have I heard such an ovation as the one which broke out at that instant. The bull lay at my feet, dead from the one thrust I had given it; and then I understood that I had been holding the sword so tightly that I was unable to release it when the bull tossed me, so that I had pulled it out again as I sailed into the air.

From that moment my credit as a torero was re-established.

The second bull was as big and ill-favoured as the first. I played it with cape and muleta with great enthusiasm; but as I was giving it a *pase de rodillas* it hooked and gored me in the leg. They took me to the infirmary; but my honour was restored, and the Valencians broke their hands with applauding me as I was carried away in the arms of the attendants.

From the infirmary I was taken to hospital on a stretcher. On the way, I realised that among the crowd that surrounded the stretcher-bearers there was a very beautiful girl. I asked them to raise the curtains so that I could look at her, as she walked slowly beside the stretcher. She had a face like a Madonna.

In the hospital next day, at visiting time, she came into the ward and walked slowly down the line of beds, looking for me; but

when she reached my cot she only looked at me and passed on. She came again the day after, and the day after that. She would stroll up and down the ward; and at last, for a moment, she would stand still, some distance away, and smile at me. When I tried to sit up and speak to her she was frightened and went away.

She came day after day, and her grave and beautiful face is one of the sweetest recollections of my bullfighting career. In the long nights of fever that followed, I was always haunted by the memory of that radiant girl who came every morning to stand for a little while at the foot of my bed. One day she ventured to bring me some flowers, and I felt happier than I had ever been in my life.

24

I was a month in hospital, and when I came out I found that I was a young torero of some standing. They began to think of me as a partner for Joselito; and in one *corrida* I substituted for Limeño, who had been injured. I was contracted for two more *novilladas*, one without *picadors* and the other at night; I got eighty pesetas for each of them, which I sent home to my people. I did well in both, and the critics praised me highly. One of them said that I was a diamond in the rough.

The echo of my successes in Valencia reached Sevilla; and Calderón, who was still telling everyone that I was a bullfighting phenomenon, asked me to send him fifty copies of the paper that had that bit about the "diamond in the rough" in it, so that he could stick them under the noses of the people who had refused to believe in me. There was also a man who sold potatoes in the Encarnación market who saw me fight in Valencia, and went

back to Sevilla saying that I was a great torero.

In this way a very favourable atmosphere was being built up, and the time came when Calderón advised me to go and fight in Sevilla. The religious brotherhoods of Sevilla were organising some novilladas to collect funds for the processions of Holy Week; they were engaging two well-known novilleros whose names could be counted on to draw the public, and the third place was to be given to any young fighter, obscure or even bad, whose friends undertook to sell the largest number of seats. In this humble position I became part of the programme presented by the Brotherhood of San Bernardo on the 21st of July, 1912. My friends Don Francisco Herrera and Don Carlos Vásquez, who had money, and Antofito Conde, who had none, guaranteed the seats which had to be taken for me to be allowed to fight. On these conditions I returned to the Sevilla bullring.

I wanted to make my entry into Triana with a certain amount of splash; so before I left Valencia, with the little money I had, I got myself made a very loud summer suit and bought myself a pair of red shoes which were then considered the height of elegance. My friends, who had already heard about my triumphs in Valencia, received me with great enthusiasm; and I was putting on all the airs of a torero for their benefit, with my light suit and flaming shoes, until one of the irrepressible loafers of the gang poured cold water on my complacency. I was in the Altozano telling the story of my triumphs when he said languidly:

"That's all very well, and I'm sure you're getting to be a great torero; but you'd better take off that comedian's costume and those pansy shoes if you don't want all the brats in the Cava to chase you like a tourist."

So I began to realise how impossible it was for me to look the

part. Nature had ordained that I could never be an arrogant and dominating character, and I had to resign myself to the fact. But whether I could swagger or not, I had made up my mind to be applauded in Sevilla. There is a letter in existence which I wrote at the time to my friend Riverito, in which apparently I gave convincing expression to the heroic resolution that filled my mind.

On the eve of the corrida I was walking through Triana with my chest blown out, trying to look as much like a famous bullfighter as I could, accompanied by Calderón and five or six other admirers who had joined the escort. There was a melon stall near the door of my home; and Calderón, as incorrigibly boastful as ever, stopped to give warning to the melon man.

"If you take my advice," he said solemnly, "you'll move your melons somewhere else in the morning, unless you want to lose them all."

"Why should I move them?" growled the other.

"Because tomorrow they will be bringing the matador home in triumph," said Calderón, "and the people will be so blind with enthusiasm that they'll use your melons for a carpet."

The melon man looked me up and down and shrugged his shoulders contemptuously, doubtless convinced that we were half-witted. On the following day, as Calderón had prophesied, the crowd that carried me home on their shoulders didn't leave a single edible melon behind.

At the beginning of that corrida, which was my consecration and conclusive triumph as a novillero, I had a moment of absolute discouragement. When the first bull came out, Larita played it with the cape, very neatly and courageously, and later made a *quite* which brought a burst of applause. Then Posada fought, and also received an ovation; and then it was my turn. I had hardly

opened my cape when the bull charged and tore it out of my hands. Larita shone again with the second bull in a very close *quite*; and after him Posada, who was frankly out to go one better, earned himself a tremendous ovation. Then again it was my turn; and again, at the first charge, the bull took the cape away from me. When I was able to get it back I attempted another pass, and for the third time the bull carried the cape away on its horns. Larita, a great swashbuckler, reached the bull before me, placed his hand calmly on its head, took off the cape, and handed it back to me with a superb flourish. I was stupefied.

I saw that they were making fun of me, and I was overcome with despair. Where had I got the idea that I was a bullfighter?

"You've been fooling yourself," I thought. "Because you had some luck in a couple of novilladas without picadors, you think you can do anything. This is more serious than you think, you poor sap."

As soon as my bull came out I went up to it, and at the third pass I heard the howl of the multitude rising to its feet. What had I done? All at once I forgot the public, the other bullfighters, myself, and even the bull; I began to fight as I had fought so often by myself at night in the corrals and pastures, as precisely as if I had been drawing a design on a blackboard.

They say that my passes with the cape and my work with the muleta that afternoon were a revelation of the art of bullfighting. I don't know, and I'm not competent to judge. I simply fought as I believed one ought to fight, without a thought outside my own faith in what I was doing. With the last bull I succeeded for the first time in my life in delivering myself body and soul to the pure joy of fighting without being consciously aware of an audience. When I was playing bulls alone in the country I used to talk to

them; and that afternoon I held a long conversation with the bull, all the time that my muleta was tracing the arabesques of the faena. When I didn't know what else to do with the bull, I knelt down under its horns and brought my face close to its muzzle.

"Come on, little bull," I whispered. "Catch me!"

I stood up again, spread the muleta under its nose, and went on with my monologue, encouraging it to keep on charging.

"This way, little bull. Charge me nicely. Nothing's going to happen to you . . . Here you are. Here you are . . . Do you see me, little bull? . . . What? You're getting tired? . . . Come on! Catch me! Don't be a coward . . . Catch me!"

I was executing the ideal faena, the faena that I had seen so often and in so much detail in my dreams that every line of it was drawn in my brain with mathematical exactness. The faena of my dreams always ended disastrously, because when I went in for the kill the bull invariably caught me in the leg. It must have been some subconscious acknowledgment of my lack of skill in killing that always dictated this tragic conclusion. Nevertheless, I went on realising my ideal faena, placing myself right between the horns of the bull, and hearing the acclamation of the crowd only as a distant murmur; until at last, exactly as I had dreamed it, the bull did catch me and wounded me in the thigh. I was so intoxicated, so outside myself, that I scarcely noticed it. I went in for the kill and the bull fell at my feet.

The public poured into the arena. I felt myself picked up, lifted above a sea of shouting faces, passed from hand to hand over a wave of humanity. I passed twice round the ring, scrambling over the shoulders of the frenzied mob. I remember that as they bore me towards the Prince's Gate I saw near the barrera an old *aficionado* of the classical breed, with his broad-brimmed hat

pushed on to the back of his head and his hands raised towards the sky, calling heaven to bear witness to the marvel that his eyes had been spared to see, with the tears streaming down his face.

High above the crowd, I crossed the bridge and passed through the streets of Triana. Worn out with emotion and unutterable happiness, half out of my mind with the agony of my wound, which nobody had noticed, I heard for the first time the shout of "Long live Belmonte!" It sounded strange and disconcerting in my ears.

Thus I entered the little patio, borne aloft on the human tide that flowed and jostled right into our miserable room and dropped me like a doll on the only bed we had. The blood was pouring out of my wound, and I felt myself fainting, while my poor family gathered trembling around me, and in the street outside the shout was still thundering from a thousand delirious throats:

"Viva Belmonte!"

Part Three:

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY

THE FRUITS OF VICTORY

I

AFTER my triumph in Sevilla I had a feeling that everything was accomplished. All I had to do was to let myself be carried along on the flood-tide of success. The agonies of my early days, the constant doubt of myself, the secret despair—all these things were over. I was sure now that I should never slip back.

I was so sure of myself that on the day after the fight, with the fifty duros I had been paid, I decided to restore the family fortunes and rescue my unfortunate young brothers, who by that time were scattered among the various orphanages of Sevilla. We had a great reunion—my father, my stepmother, and my nine brothers and sisters. To celebrate the triumph I took them all to eat at La Bomba, a famous restaurant where for very little money they gave you a gigantic meal of which the soup alone was the epitome of all my gastronomic dreams of those days.

The impresarios were eager to exploit the success of the moment, and contracts began to shower upon me. The following Sunday I went to fight at Sanlúcar de Barrameda, where I gave myself the pleasure of strolling along the beach, dressed up like a young lord, and eating prawns for the first time in my life. My wound from Sevilla was still open, and when I went in to kill the first novillo I was knocked down and trampled.

On the following Sunday I was booked to fight in another novillada organised by a Sevillian Brotherhood. The chief brother

seemed as concerned about my health as if I had been his own child; and to make sure that I should be well looked after and recover quickly, he installed me in a comfortable boarding-house at his own expense. But when the day of the *corrida* arrived I was still in no condition to fight, and that same day the affectionate brother withdrew his protection and hospitality.

A week later I was able to return to the ring, and succeeded in consolidating my first triumph. From then on I had as many fights as I could cope with. During the remaining months of the season I fought more than twenty novilladas, most of them in bull-rings close to Sevilla: Utrera, Sanlúcar, Morón, Higuera, Santa Olalla, Ecija, Fregenal, and Pilas. I also fought in Cádiz, Ubeda, Cartagena, San Sebastián, and Barcelona. In Barcelona I made a number of sensational discoveries which I was bursting to share with my old friends as soon as I returned to Triana. One of these discoveries was that the street women in Barcelona wore hats, and the other was that the Catalans didn't share their cigarettes. In Andalucía, of course, which was the only world I knew, the only head-covering which a woman ever wore was the traditional mantilla, and no man would ever think of lighting a cigarette without offering them round. I told these stories in San Jacinto and nobody would believe me.

In San Sebastián I had to kill six novillos, because Posada, who was alternating with me, was gored by the first. On account of my physical weakness and my strict conception of responsibility towards the public, I ordinarily refuse to undertake to kill more than two bulls in an afternoon; but when the necessity arises, as it did in that *corrida*, I have always managed to dominate myself, to tap some hidden reserve of strength under my weakness, and to do what is expected of me.

It is difficult for me to remember the details of all the corridas I have fought. Besides, as soon as my bullfighting life took a professional trend, I lost the emotional interest which has kept the episodes of what I will dare to call my heroic period so fresh and vivid in my memory. I went on fighting, with good or bad fortune, and soon the din of popularity began to rise around my small body.

At the Ecija Fair I felt the enthusiasm of the public warmer and closer to me than anywhere else. I fought in the two novilladas of the Fair; and in the first I was lucky enough to attain one of those supreme moments which crystallise all the thrill of the art of fighting and killing bulls in spite of the inevitable hardening which professionalism gives.

It was with the last bull. Nearly all my great triumphs have been achieved with those last bulls which come out from the pen when the evening is drawing on and the sun has dipped below the walls of the arena, and the public, worn out with the emotion of the previous fights, is gazing distractedly at what is happening in the ring. With that bull I surrendered myself entirely to the pure pleasure of fighting which the torero can so seldom feel to the full. The public let itself be carried away by the enthusiasm that I put into what I was doing; and when, satisfied with the faena which had held me intoxicated, I raised my eyes to the stands, I saw a sight that overwhelmed me with pride. Thousands of people were applauding me frenziedly. Even the musicians of the band, who had already put away their instruments, had been caught up in the excitement and had taken their instruments out again to add to the noise, each of them playing whatever came into his head. I was carried to the inn on the shoulders of a mob that cheered itself hoarse in my honour. Later I discovered that I had the finger-prints of one rabid enthusiast bruised into the calf of my leg. It was exactly like one of

the scenes Eugenio Noel describes in his diatribes against bullfighting.

That night, feeling suffocated by the pressure of admirers, I sneaked away from the inn and went to the Fair alone with my cap pulled down over my eyes. I wanted to amuse myself with some of those puerile diversions which I had yearned for in vain through all my infancy; and I was having a lovely time on the merry-go-rounds when I was discovered by some people who were searching for me at the request of Don Pedro La Borbolla to introduce me to some gentlemen who wanted to meet the "phenomenon."

On the following day these gentlemen took me for a ride in an open carriage drawn by five horses beautifully caparisoned in the Andalusian style. They drove me in triumph through the main avenue of the Fair, and men and women poured out of the club marquees to offer me wine and congratulate me.

I felt myself dragged along in the grip of a cyclone of popularity that would have been enough to turn anybody's head, however firmly it might have been screwed on; and I, a bewildered boy, was naturally lost in this strange new world of frenzied enthusiasms, inexplicable adulation, and incomprehensible homage. The only thing that saved me was my hopeless inability to carry off the arrogance that I should have liked so much to assume, my childishness that came from dreaming of a childhood I had never had, and the bitterness and suspicion that had been bequeathed to me by the failures and injustices of my hard apprenticeship. The popularity that I enjoyed and endured during my first two or three years of bullfighting was one of those freaks of crowd psychology which it is difficult enough for sociologists to analyse afterwards. You can imagine how hopeless it was for me to try and explain it to myself at the time.

I believe that few men have been so closely touched by popularity as I was. Years afterwards, even when my fame had spread over the whole country and overflowed to the other side of the Atlantic, I never had the same feeling of being bound up with the crowd, of being flattered and watched over by them, that I had in those early days when my popularity was almost exclusively local, and when it was only the people of Triana and Sevilla who poured their enthusiasm into converting me into a living legend. I was what they wanted me to be: good or bad, courageous or cowardly, ugly or beautiful, lovable or detestable, anything that their imaginative fervour dictated. To each one of them I was a part of himself. Good fathers held me up as an example because I had brought fortune to my family; those who hoped to make a success of life looked at me as a mirror in which they could see their own future success; those who were unfortunate thought how much greater than theirs had been my misfortunes; those who were fighting a losing struggle for existence remembered that I had been even more handicapped and had overcome my handicaps; those who were conscious of being ugly and unshapely consoled themselves with the thought that I was ugly and unshapely too. They looked at me and saw me so weak, so insignificant, so different from what one would expect a conquering hero to be, that their own weaknesses seemed much less of an obstacle to triumph.

There was also in my favour the pity which a doomed man inspires. All the technicians laid it down as a fact that I should inevitably be killed by a bull, because it was impossible to fight in the way I fought. Rafael Guerra had sentenced me: "Hurry up and see him fight," he is alleged to have said, "because if you don't see him soon you'll never see him."

Also I hadn't made very much money then, which always

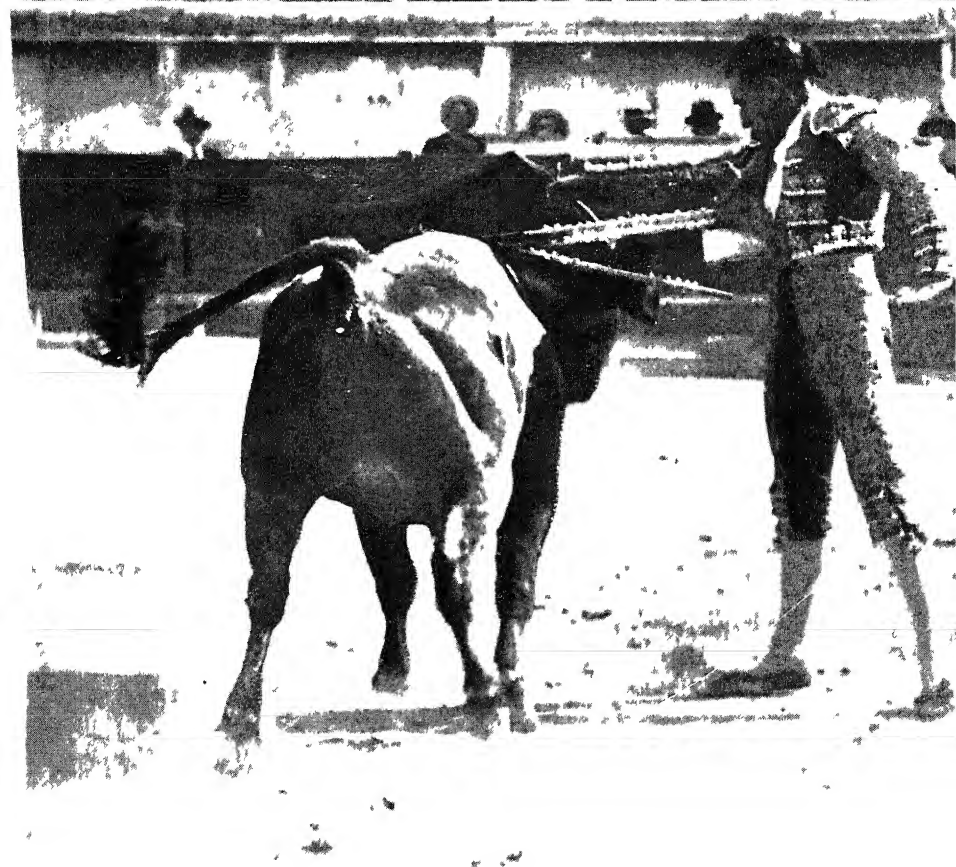
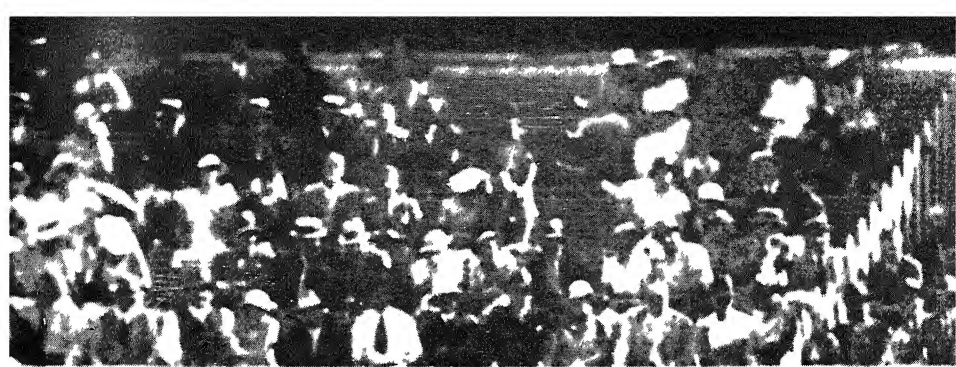
helps people to feel sympathetic towards you.

Sevilla was full of me. Discussions in the taverns, popular fiestas, newspaper controversies, and even the popular songs, all turned around the myth of Juan Belmonte. The crowd swamped my own personality, so that I began to hate my new popularity. It was too heavy a burden for my frail shoulders. I couldn't even go out in the street without being pestered.

In Triana there was a brat who was always hanging around my house, apparently because he loved the excitement that could be so easily produced with my unwilling assistance. As soon as I showed my face in the street he would dash off in front of me shrieking: "Belmonte! Here comes Belmonte!"

Whereupon all the gossips of the neighbourhood would come to the doors of their houses and talk about what a good son I was, the drunks would come out of the taverns and make me drink their wine, the girls would look out of their windows and smile at me, the children would dance and squeal with delight, the dogs would bark, the passing carts and carriages would stop, the police would have to turn out to keep order, and I would have to run for my life, cursing the whole thing. I developed an insane hatred for that brat who roused the whole district whenever I put my nose outside the door. One evening I was going out with Riverito, and knowing what to expect we caught him before he could raise his usual cry. We took him into the house, shut the door, and gave him a hiding which cured him of that hobby.

When I was doing my military service in Sevilla, the General was obsessed with the idea that I was given too much consideration in the barracks. Why didn't I go to the parade grounds with the others? The Colonel passed on the order that I was to turn out the same as the other recruits. We were marching through the streets of



A *pase natural por alto*. In this, as in the preceding picture, is crystallised as much of that quality called *emoción* as can be conveyed without the dimension of movement.



"I dragged myself into the ring, almost unable to walk, opened the cape, and gave my lesson as best I could."

Sevilla when I was noticed in the ranks, and people began to fall in alongside and march in step with us, affectionately shouting: "Juan! Juan!" By the time we got back, the word had gone round, and a huge crowd was waiting at the barrack gates to see me come in. The General was also waiting there to make sure that I had attended the parade; and to leave him no doubts on this score he was a witness of how the people pushed their way through the ranks and completely broke up the formation in order to swarm round me. That afternoon, the General issued another order that Private Juan Belmonte was never to go out with the regiment again.

A popularity like this also has its obligations. Nothing you have can be entirely your own—your intimacy, your affections, or even your money. Up to a point this is logical. When anyone who has expended his energy in arguing about a torero instead of working wants something, he goes to the torero to whose glory he has devoted the best part of his life and asks for it. Therefore a bull-fighter must be generous; and I accepted this duty resignedly. The twenty-odd corridas which I fought that first season earned me some ten or twelve thousand pesetas, which I wisely entrusted to the management of my patron, Don Francisco Herrera. Every Saturday Herrera would give me fifty duros, which usually lasted me until Sunday or Monday. It wasn't that I was extravagant; but everyone thought that he had a right to ask me for what he wanted, and I was vain enough to assume what I felt was my responsibility. There were days when I went out to go to a café, and the beggars would be lined up all along the road, each of them taking something from me in turn, until when I sat down at my destination I had to ask the waiter to let me pay him next time because I had no money left on me. They also made me an honorary member or honorary president of innumerable strange societies, and solemnly presented

me with very beautiful diplomas to which I had to reciprocate with a cash donation. Tradition demands these things of a popular bullfighter, and I had to accept the situation and be grateful. The person who couldn't accept it or be grateful was my father, who raised an outcry against it which seriously endangered my reputation.

Another inconvenience was that of having to let myself be roped in by those who were generous enough to admire me. You can't defraud your admirers—much less those of the female sex. Once I was walking very soberly past an inn where some admirers of mine were on a spree with four or five women. Whether I liked it or not, I was forced to join in. One of their lady friends, who was known by the delicate nickname of *Chivita*, which means Nannygoat, suddenly started to make love to me. She turned her back on her escort and announced that she had resolved to be mine or die. I resisted as much as a fighter of brave animals can resist, but her escort considered it a high honour to renounce his claims to the passionate *Chivita* in my favour. Which was one of the most unfortunate things that ever happened to me in my bullfighting life.

2

The following year I began to fight in February. In Barcelona I took part in two novilladas in which luck was with me. I was carried shoulder-high through the Ramblas; and some newspaper protested against the incident, which it considered a disgraceful exhibition for a cultured people like the Catalans to make of themselves.

Even in those corridas, the public wanted to see me in competition

with Joselito, who was then rated the best of the novilleros. Some of the critics who were most enthusiastic about Joselito went to Barcelona to see me fight, and asserted that I was a promising youngster but certainly no phenomenon.

I fought two more novilladas in Valencia, and after that I went to Toulouse with Posada and Cortijano. My first contact with France left me dumbfounded. Everything seemed so extraordinary. I learned on that journey that there were many more things in the world than were dreamed of at the refreshment kiosk in San Jacinto. I discovered that it was possible to live in a different way, that people thought differently and were moved by different impulses from any that we had ever known. And I also discovered that they definitely lived better, more comfortably, and more attractively.

Some pretty girls came to the hotel where we were staying to have a good look at our costumes. They amused themselves by trying them on before our astounded eyes—putting on the jackets, winding the sashes round their waists, and giggling while they struck absurd poses in front of the mirror. What disconcerted us most was that they took very little notice of us. In spite of their apparent easiness, they knew just how to keep our advances at arm's length—a circumstance which flabbergasted Spaniards like us, who were unaccustomed to joking about such a serious thing as sex. This unfamiliar strategy made my companions scowl like thwarted villains in a melodrama, but it tickled me to death.

I could hardly wait to get back and tell my friends in Triana about it. But when the gang heard these traveller's tales they thought I was raving. They couldn't believe that there was any other life than ours, or any other women than the solemn wenches who thought of nothing but finding a husband, or the fallen angels

that we knew. But I had learned that there were other things in the world: people of better character, who amused themselves better and were happier than any Andalusian knew how to be.

3

I fought again in Barcelona and afterwards in Bilbao, and with a reputation as a phenomenon of which I was by no means unconscious I went on to Madrid. I had been fighting in partnership with Posada, and the success of our last novilladas had raised such a dust of discussion around us that the *aficionados* of Madrid were eager to see us in the flesh. Before we reached the city, the most fashionable reporter of the time, who wrote under the name of "The Convent Ghost," got into the train on which we were travelling and wrote an interview for the *Heraldo de Madrid* in which we told the stories of our lives and the miracles we had performed. All this gave a great air of importance to our début. The Ghost, who was a master of the art of arousing interest, took us straight from the station to the Teatro Romea where Pastora Imperio was dancing; he introduced us to her and had us photographed together. Pastora had not long ago been separated from her husband, Rafael el Gallo, the great torero; but I didn't appreciate the brazen air of challenge which this performance inferred. In those days, these tricks of publicity and scandal were more than I could understand.

After giving me all this publicity and doing all the honours of my entrance into Madrid, the Ghost said to me:

"Tomorrow I shall be in a front seat with Pastora. Will you dedicate a bull to me?"

I was glad enough to make the promise.

The corrida was due to take place on the 25th of March, but it was postponed until the following day on account of rain. This only prolonged and keyed up the expectation of judging the "phenomenons" as they called us, and increased my own anxiety to justify it.

I gave the first novillo five *verónicas* which were received enthusiastically; and as I came out of a *recorte* I brought myself so close to the bull that I received a wound in my thigh. The audience was captured from that moment. When the time came for the kill, I took the sword and muleta and went towards the place where the Ghost and Pastora were sitting.

When the public realised my intention there was a terrific uproar. From all parts of the stadium arose shouts of: "No! No!"

I realised at once what was happening; but I pretended not to notice it, and went on imperturbably to stand in front of the journalist with my hat in my hand. A veritable tempest of howls and whistles descended on me. The unpopularity of the Ghost was transferred to me, and I saw clearly that that dedication would do me no good. But I had promised to dedicate the bull to him, and I kept my word. It isn't easy to defy a whole bullring full of people, but when the necessity arises it has to be done, at whatever cost.

However, the bad feeling which was aroused by my unfortunate dedication was soon forgotten. Luck was with me; I killed the novillo in a good fight, after working so close to it that it tore my jacket; and from then on Madrid was as enthusiastic about my fighting as Sevilla. That night when I went into the cafés of the Alcalá and the Puerta del Sol, the people recognised me and applauded me. Madrid was conquered.

The season of 1913 was the most dramatic of my career. Arising from my début in Madrid, a furious battle began between my enthusiasts and my detractors. Without boasting, I believe that that was one of the most impassioned periods in the history of bullfighting. The rings were filled with people who were hoping or fearing that a bull would kill me at any moment; and the seal of a perspective corpse which the technicians had given me by refusing to believe that it was possible to fight as I did, raised the tension to such a height that the fever of the crowd was let loose on the slightest pretext.

I was to fight in Sevilla at the beginning of April; but the appointed day dawned rainily, and the other two matadors and I agreed that the corrida would have to be postponed because the arena was swamped. Those who were beginning to consider themselves defrauded because I hadn't been killed as quickly as their technical knowledge insisted that I ought to be, became angry and started a great scandal on this pretext, saying that the plain truth was that I had lost my nerve. They put forward the theory that I had gambled my life like a lunatic in my early fights, but that now I didn't care to take any more chances. Some days later the postponed corrida took place, and I managed to demonstrate that if I was frightened I was at least clever enough to conceal the fact.

The following day I fought again in Madrid, and that was my real consecration.

I went into the ring like a mathematician going to the blackboard to prove a theorem. At that time the art of bullfighting was governed by the picturesque axiom of Lagartijo which said: "You

stand *there*, and either you move yourself or the bull moves you." I was there to demonstrate that this was not as self-evident as they thought. My theory was: "You stand there, and you don't move and the bull doesn't move you—if you know how to fight." At that time there was a complicated system of "territories of the bull" and "territories of the torero," which in my judgment was quite superfluous. The bull has no territory, because it is not a reasoning creature and there are no surveyors to lay down its boundaries. All the ground belongs to the torero, the only intelligent being in the game, and it seemed natural to me that he should keep them.

Those who saw me defying what they considered to be cosmic laws threw up their hands and said: "He's bound to die. If he doesn't change his ground he'll be killed." I didn't change my ground, the bull took a long time to kill me; and the knowing ones, instead of resigning themselves to recognise that there might be quite a simple and logical explanation which they hadn't thought of, went into hysterics and began to call me an earthquake, a cataclysm, a phenomenon, and I don't know how many other absurdly exaggerated things. As far as I was concerned, the only phenomenon was their lack of comprehension. What the humblest *aficionado* knows today, twenty years later, couldn't penetrate the skulls of those who were then the authorities on bullfighting. This was my whole contribution to the art.

In my second *corrida* in Madrid, "Don Modesto," the most famous critic of the day, took my side and wrote that I was fighting as Lagartijo, Frascuelo, Guerrita, Espartero, Fuentes, Bombita, Machaco, and the Gallos had never fought. This bold assertion let loose a hurricane of passions of which I was the stupefied vortex. I was just a poor fellow who thought he knew the truth and said so. I was saying it in all the bullrings, proving it in front of the bulls,

with the cape or muleta in my hands, without any artifice. I was no expert, I didn't know the job very well, I had none of the resources of experience, and in addition I was so ill that I could scarcely move. I dragged myself into the ring, almost unable to walk, opened the cape, and gave my lesson as best I could. That was all. But what a tumult it caused! Nobody believed that I was fighting with conscious artistry. It was easier for them to think that I was a Smart Alec, a reckless suicide whose philosophy was that it was better to risk being gored than to starve. Instead of the cautious and calculating courage which one must have to fight bulls, and which in reality was what I had, they credited me with the fabulous valour of a legendary hero and a superhuman contempt for life which in fact I have never had.

But their misunderstanding did me no harm. On the contrary, it was an advantage. And it serves to explain why the incorporation of my personal manner of fighting into the traditional art provoked this controversy, which if I put aside all false modesty I should call one of the most intense stages through which bullfighting has passed.

5

When I went out to fight for the second time in Madrid I was really ill. I could hardly stand on my feet. Old troubles that had never been properly cured had drained my energy until I was kept going by nothing but enthusiasm, the spiritual force derived from the impetus of my success. In the street I couldn't take a step. In the arena, on the other hand, the public rose from their seats with a lump in their throats when they saw me fight. I mention this in

support of my thesis that bullfighting is more than anything else a spiritual exercise. In a predominantly physical activity, a physical wreck like I was at that time could never have triumphed. If the fundamental thing in bullfighting were strength of body and not of spirit, I should never have achieved anything in my life.

Once when I was in North America, I was interviewed by a Yankee journalist who while we were talking did nothing but look me up and down and round about with an insistence and a stupefaction that were frankly annoying. At last he turned to the friend who was interpreting for us and said: "And is he really the king of bullfighters?" Again he stared at me impertinently, confronted me with a photograph of mine which he had, and repeated: "Are you sure that this is the king of bullfighters?" I realised his state of mind and became angry. I stood up to put an end to the interview and said to my friend: "Tell this fool yes, that I am the king of bullfighters, and he needn't go on staring at me. Tell him that we don't kill bulls with our fists; and if he can't understand that, tell him that bullfighting is a spiritual exercise, a genuine art. And kick him out."

In this way and in no other I was able to triumph in Madrid. But although I was so carried away by the thrill of success that I didn't notice it, some of my friends were terrified to see me in such bad physical condition. Fernando Gillis spoke to my manager, Antonio Soto, and they agreed that I should have to rest for a while and be placed under treatment. I was lucky enough to be taken in hand by an excellent doctor and enthusiastic *aficionado* by the name of Serrano, to whom I owe my health and perhaps my life. I shut myself up in Sevilla, where Serrano came to look after me, and in a few days he managed to patch me up a little.

Nevertheless it was not easy to withdraw from the duties of the

popularity I had won. The complete rest which had been recommended to me was disturbed by the good spirits of a horde of friends and admirers who never left me in peace. Whether I liked it or not, they dragged me out on parties and excursions, kept me drinking with them, and generally wore me out as much as if I had been fighting. I was still besieged by eager impresarios, whose eagerness was really no greater than my own; and twenty days later, although I was still far from cured, I returned to the arena.

There was so much curiosity in Spain to see me fight that for a week I fought every day in a different place. I started in Alicante, where I couldn't kill any bulls because the first one caught me as I was giving it a pass. In spite of this wound, I went on fighting all the other days of the week. On Tuesday I was in Ecija, on Wednesday in Huelva, on Thursday in Sevilla, on Friday in Cortegana, on Saturday in Osuna, and on Sunday in Badajoz. I felt that I simply could not go to Badajoz, and my manager telegraphed to say that I was sick; but early that morning we were visited by some police officers sent by the Civil Governor of Sevilla, to whom the Governor of Badajoz had telegraphed saying that Juan Belmonte must fight there whatever happened, because the city had been invaded by thousands of strangers from all over Extremadura and Portugal, and he was afraid that there would be serious riots if I didn't fight. So I was forced to go there, although I did make the condition that I should take another matador to substitute for me, while I only undertook to try and appease the public by letting them look at me.

But one thing simply led to another. If I could appear at Badajoz on Sunday, why couldn't I show up at Pozoblanco on Monday? And so the chain went on. I still found enough strength to fight once more in Linares, but at the end of that corrida I finally collapsed.

I was only able to take a fortnight's rest. Dr Serrano was furious when I talked about fighting, and my friends advised me to give it up; but I was involved with too many interested parties, and as soon as I was on my feet I myself wanted to go back at once to the ring. On the 1st of June I was opening my cape again in the bullring at Málaga. I also fought in Antequera and Huelva, and on the 8th I went to Valencia.

6

At Valencia I was badly received. The spectators were shouting at me and insulting me from the beginning of the procession into the arena until the last bull was dragged out. Nothing I did would calm them; and that day I felt all the weight of the injustice of the mob laid on my shoulders. I couldn't make out why the Valencians had turned against me, and why they whistled at me that afternoon as vigorously as they had applauded me before. When the corrida was over I talked to the impresario about that inexplicable hostility.

"The thing is that they feel you're letting them down," he said. "They think that because you're supposed to be a phenomenon the managements are only giving you easy fights in which you can show off without too much trouble. There's a rumour that you've refused to take on some big and difficult novillos that they've got in the pens here."

"If that's the case," I answered, "tell them that I'll fight these bulls the day after tomorrow."

That same night I had to leave for Madrid, where I was fighting the following day, and as soon as the fight was over I went straight to the station and caught a train back to Valencia to satisfy the

people there by tackling the heavy bulls that they wanted to put up against me. I duly fought the corrida, and was applauded with the same enthusiasm as I had been booed two days before. The bull-fighting public is like that.

Once more I went from the bullring to the station, because the next day I had to fight again in Madrid. I was worn out, and on top of that I was racked with the pain of a wound which one of those bulls had given me in my hand. I couldn't close my eyes during the journey. I remember that towards eleven o'clock at night the train stopped at a station where I got out and tried desperately to find something that would ease the pain. One of my banderilleros went up to one of those parties of girls who used to go to the stations to enjoy the harmless romance of exchanging smiles with a few travellers whom they would never see again.

"Have you got anything that would help to ease a wound?" he asked. "It's for Juan Belmonte."

"For Belmonte? Where is he?"

"Over there."

I smiled weakly at the girls; and they must have been touched to see me in so much pain, for they ran off and came back before the train started again with all the specifics that they could find within half a mile of the station. Popularity has these delicious compensations.

I was almost out on my feet when I went into the arena in Madrid the next day. When they let out my bull I walked painfully towards it, planted my feet on the ground, and citing it more with my will than with my arms I gave it five smooth and slow *verónicas* which were perhaps the best I have done in my life, without moving an inch. The public roared with enthusiasm. At the end of a *recorte*, the bull rushed me and trampled on me, leaving me on the

ground with my costume ripped to pieces. When I felt them pick me up and carry me away, I closed my eyes in blissful relief. All around me the crowd was cheering, but I heard the noise only as a confused murmur, infinitely far away. I was half unconscious. They put me on the operating table in the infirmary, where I lay limply with my eyes shut and only a blurred awareness of what was going on around me.

When the doctor arrived and prepared his instruments and began to take off my clothes, I had even stopped thinking. I was peacefully asleep. They tell me that he went over me inch by inch in a tense silence, while I gave no sign of life.

"What's the matter with him?" asked my *mozo de espadas* anxiously.

"The matter with him," announced the doctor at length, "is that he wants some rest. He has gone to sleep, gentlemen. And that's the only treatment he needs."

They didn't let me go on enjoying the treatment. They put one of the attendants' trousers on me, and I had to get up and go on fighting. It was one of my triumphant afternoons. "Five *verónicas* without a fault!" gasped the technicians. To which my answer would have been: "Five days fighting without a wink of sleep!"

7

I had to leave bulls alone for a little while; and I decided to stay in Madrid to rest and be taken care of. I stayed at a picturesque inn in the Calle de Echegaray which must have been the craziest house in the world. The guests were mostly bullfighters, young hard-up novilleros who were just starting their careers, old banderilleros

who were just about at the end of theirs, *mozos de espadas*, picadors, and all the unclassifiable camp followers of bullfighting. The landlord was an extraordinary individual whom we called "The Lamp-lighter." He had wanted to be a torero in his youth; and now in his old age he boasted of having been a smuggler and even a bandit in the old legendary style of Andalucía. He was really a good fellow, even if he was a little cracked.

We had another extraordinary specimen for an errand boy, who was known as Don Antonio the Daft, who in spite of his lamentable appearance, his flat feet, and his hang-dog expression, fancied himself as a lady-killer. He believed that he was irresistible to women, and regaled us with fantastic stories of his amorous adventures. His method of conquest was infallible: when he saw a woman he liked, he stared at her fixedly with his protruding eyes until, as he said, "they went well into her," and then he thrust his face forward and clicked his tongue delicately. It always worked. According to him, no woman could resist the sensual insinuation of his bulging eyes and clicking tongue, and they simply fell into his arms. We encouraged him by calling him Don Juan; but he drew himself up and said:

"I'm much, much more than Don Juan. He had to make his conquests with the help of his money and Brígida, but I've got no money and no procuress. It would be different if I even had a stick and a watch-chain."

Because the only things that Don Antonio the Daft thought that he lacked to make himself completely irresistible were a stick and a watch-chain. He was one of those weird characters that one finds in Madrid, neither quite daft nor quite normal, sharp-witted, ridiculous, and yet full of cunning, a typical product of the atmosphere of Madrid in those days.

That summer in Madrid, surrounded by these picturesque and argumentative people, watching from my balcony the passing to and fro of the old-fashioned types who had not yet disappeared, the cheap prostitutes with shawls round their shoulders and handkerchiefs on their heads, the poor devils who stood bargaining with them in the gutter, the greenhorns who filled the wicked cafés where they employed waitresses instead of waiters, the drunks in the low taverns and the bowler-hatted gentlemen who sneaked in with them, hoping that none of their respectable friends would see them—all that life of twenty years ago had a colour and a vividness which it has lost today. It fascinated and amused me so much that I felt as happy in the Lamplighter's inn as if I had been in the most comfortable hotel.

The same night that I arrived in Madrid I went to the Café de Fornos, and happened to sit next to a party of writers and artists who regularly met there. Among them was Julio Antonio, the sculptor, Romero de Torres, Don Ramón del Valle Inclán, Pérez de Ayala, Enrique de Mesa, Sebastián Miranda, and various others.

Sebastián Miranda happened to make a bet with me, and from that moment we became friends. Afterwards I went to visit him in a studio which he had in the Calle de Montalbán. I felt myself strongly attracted by the strange life of these artists and writers, which seemed to me to be surrounded with all the glamour of Bohemia. From the beginning I did my best to win their sympathy, and I was amazed to find how liberally it was given. I would go to Miranda's studio and sit quietly in a corner, listening to their arguments and straining every nerve to understand them. It was not an easy task. I began to spend hours and hours of mental gymnastics listening to things which I didn't understand; but after a while I began to get my bearings, and thought that in spite of the

differences of style and language I could discover in their attitude a curious similarity with the rebellious spirit of my anarchistic friends in Triana.

I had to make a great effort to understand them. The transition from robbing orchards around Sevilla to finding a place in that circle of great artists and writers who discussed abstruse problems of philosophy and æsthetics was too sudden, and I had to be extremely discreet. For their part, they encouraged me with their kindness; although it must have seemed to them that my speech and behaviour were always too prudent to have come naturally from an almost illiterate young bullfighter. The time came when I found I was more at home with these people than with anyone else, even though they were so different from myself; and many nights I even stayed to sleep at Miranda's studio. I was completely captured by their vivid personalities, and most of all by that of Valle Inclán.

For me he was an almost supernatural being. I would gaze at him reverently while he ran his slender fingers through his magnificent beard and told me emphatically:

"Juanito, all you have left to do is to die in the bullring."

"I'll do my best, Don Ramón," I would answer modestly.

It occurred to them to pay me a compliment. They issued a manifesto over the signatures of Romero de Torres, Julio Antonio, Sebastián Miranda, Pérez de Ayala, and Valle Inclán in which they asserted that bullfighting was no less æsthetic than the *beaux arts*, with which statement they combined some unflattering remarks about politicians and a number of audacious affirmations about the theory of art. I was dumbfounded to feel that I had been the cause of all that.

They gave me a banquet in the Retiro, where the smartest people in Madrid used to dine. When the proprietor of the restaurant

discovered that it was in honour of a bullfighter, he discreetly placed the table in an obscure corner so that we shouldn't shock his select clientèle. But when Don Ramón arrived and saw what had happened he made a terrific scene. He went up to the proprietor, a man with a good deal of presence, who was sitting at his desk, and said to him arrogantly:

"You! Stand up!"

The proprietor was taken aback and doubtless considerably awed by the majestic demeanour of Valle Inclán.

"Y—yes, sir?" he stammered. "What can I do for you?"

"Where have you put us, you villain?" shouted Don Ramón. "Where have you put us? Answer me!"

The frightened man tried to make excuses.

"It's a part of the restaurant like any other——"

"So is the lavatory," retorted Don Ramón. "Put us in the place of honour, you scum! Do you know who we are? Do you know who this gentleman is?"

He pointed to me with a regal gesture.

I would have liked to sink through the floor. I went humbly up to Valle Inclán and said:

"Please don't bother. I can eat somewhere else——"

"What's that?" he roared. "In the place of honour, I said!"

The whole restaurant was turned upside down while they moved our table; and there I sat down to eat, overwhelmed by the elaborate homage which these famous men were doing me, and unable to understand why they should do it.

But at the beginning of October I had to change my way of life. I was immensely happy in that preposterous but delightful world in which I was learning to live; but I couldn't forget that I was a bullfighter who had aroused more emotion and curiosity than any other

in Spain. Dr Serrano gave me my discharge, and I went back to fight a few novilladas before taking the *alternativa*.* I was then getting as much as six thousand pesetas for a corrida.

I started in Jerez, where after the fight I got dragged into one of those wild Andalusian parties in which everybody got drunk, including the women, and finally the police had to break it up. It made me begin to hate the traditional kind of life that a bull-fighter was expected to lead.

Afterwards I fought in Sevilla, Toledo, Orihuela, Alicante, Valencia, and Granada, earning altogether some fifty thousand pesetas.

On the 16th of October I returned to Madrid to take my *alternativa* as a killer of bulls, in a corrida in which I was billed with Machaquito and El Gallo. During that eventful afternoon, no less than eleven bulls were brought out of the pens. The public had gone there expecting to see something sensational, and none of the bulls that fell to me seemed suitable to them. They had one bull sent back because it was not fierce enough, another because it was too small, another because it was too big. I have never heard so many people making so much noise for such a long time. That afternoon, in the middle of the storm which was raging louder every moment, a simple thought struck me which by its very simplicity seemed to have an extraordinary brilliance. It looked as if the world was coming to an end, as if they were going to set fire to the bullring, as if we were going to be hauled out and torn to pieces, and I don't know what else. I saw the crowd rising and seething, and I was scared stiff to think what it might portend. At the most deafening climax of the tumult it occurred to me to think: "In two hours it'll be dark, and all this will have to finish. They will have

* The ceremony by which a novillero becomes a full-fledged matador.

died, or they will have killed us, or whatever is going to happen will have happened. But whichever way it turns out, in less than two hours everything will be peaceful and silent. It's only a matter of waiting. Two hours pass quickly."

Ever since that day, that thought always comes back to me when I see fifteen or twenty thousand people around me howling like wild beasts. "In less than two hours," I think to myself, "they will all be home having their supper."

But in spite of all the uproar, for which I was not to blame, I managed to do well with the bulls which they did finally let me fight; and having been duly anointed a matador, I packed my bags and set off for Mexico, where I had already accepted a contract.

8

My cuadrilla embarked at Cádiz, and I went to Paris. I arrived there with a letter of introduction to a gentleman who received me very courteously; and when I expressed my fervent desire to learn all that I could about Paris in the few hours I had there, he took me to a Spanish Cabaret called *La Feria*, where I spent the night drinking *manzanilla* and mixing with guitar-players and Andalusian dancers. This sort of thing has frequently happened to me. I remember another time when I disembarked in Havana, to be welcomed with the greatest affability by a Spanish admirer who insisted on taking me to his house where he promised me the most authentic Spanish *cocido* in the world. He was deeply offended when I told him that I had left Spain and was risking my life in the bullrings of South America in order to avoid eating *cocido*.

Next day I embarked on the *Imperator*, which is now the

Berengaria. From the time I stepped off the gangway I went from marvel to marvel; but I adopted a blasé air and made up my mind that I wouldn't bat an eyelid at anything, however extraordinary it appeared. A man from Sevilla, and even more so one from Triana, couldn't go about the world gaping like a country bumpkin.

Rodolfo Gaona and his *mozo de espadas*, the famous Maera, travelled on the same boat. We didn't see Gaona during the voyage, because he was being seasick in his cabin; but the great Maera swaggered about the boat as if he owned it. When he was walking on the deck and passed a girl who pleased him, he would turn to her in his cocky way and give her a brazenly patronising "*Olé tus sacais!*"—which is just about the perfect gipsy equivalent to "Hi, bright-eyes." After which he would spit in the scuppers and strut on as if he had been in the Calle Sierpes. At night he would go into the dining-room, which was full of ladies in evening dress and gentlemen in dinner jackets, with carpet slippers on his feet and a handkerchief knotted round his neck, hoicking and spitting as if he had been in his own home.

On the other hand, I tried to adapt myself to my surroundings and make myself as inconspicuous as possible. My pigtail, of course, became something to stare at as soon as I left Spain. It startled the ship's barber, who was a typical German, and he made a joke of pretending that he was going to cut it off. I pretended to get annoyed, and when he was soaping my upper lip with his forefinger I snapped at it with my teeth as if I were trying to bite it. The fright it gave him was one of the most comical things I have ever seen. Probably he still believes that Spanish bullfighters are cannibals.

When we reached New York I stood on the deck and watched the disembarking of the hundreds of immigrants who had spent the

voyage hidden in the bowels of the ship. They were a miserable collection, mostly Jews and Poles, who crowded down the gangways in a slow-moving drove, loaded down with their pitiful bundles of belongings and dragging their wives and children by the hand. They were herded along to where the immigration officers examined them as impersonally as if they were picking cattle in the market, accepting some and rejecting others. Children were torn from their parents and wives separated from their husbands by burly policemen who took no notice of their shouts of protest, which in the general hullabaloo sounded as feeble as the bleating of sheep in a round-up.

It was a sight which made a profound and painful impression on me. I gazed at the gigantic skyscrapers which threw their monstrous shadows over the boat with a strange sensation of fear. I had never seen people treated like that, and I was horrified to think that I might be humiliated in the same way.

I didn't like New York. It was too big and too different. Those bottomless ravines didn't seem like streets, the scurrying ants in them didn't seem like men, those pitiless mountains of iron and cement didn't seem like a city. When a man walks through a street in Sevilla, his firm steps ring through the quiet patios, and without raising his head he can look up at the balconies from which other people look down at him, and his grave rich voice fills the whole street as he greets a passing friend—"Adiós, Rafael!" And it is glorious to see it, and one is proud to be a man and pass through such a street and live in such a city.

But in New York, where a man is nobody and a street is a number, how can one live?

From New York we went to Cuba. When I saw Havana for the first time twenty years ago it was a different place from what it is

today. It had not yet lost its Spanish character, which you could see in the innumerable churches, the low-built houses, and the broad quiet squares where the grass grew between the paving stones.

The thing I remember most clearly about it is a negro. I had given him my bag to take to the hotel and he did something stupid for which I cursed him irritably, whereupon this ferocious-looking giant burst into tears and began to sob into his handkerchief like a little child. I couldn't believe that there were men like that, human beings so different from those I had dealt with before.

I went there with Gaona and Enrique Uthoff, the Mexican writer, who had been banished and who was going to rejoin a group of revolutionary compatriots who lived in Havana in exile like himself; and I went to a banquet which they gave in honour of Gaona. It was like no other banquet I have attended. The speeches began before they served the *hors-d'œuvres* and went on uninterruptedly throughout the meal; there was an orator for every dish, and they were still at it two hours after we had had coffee. I stuck to my resolution of being surprised at nothing, and made up my mind to behave exactly like the others. I saw that the Mexicans from time to time picked up and ate some small red peppers which were on the table, after which they would puff out their breath in what seemed to be a sigh of satisfaction. I imitated them, and felt as if my mouth and throat had been burnt with a hot iron. The tears came to my eyes and I also puffed out my breath, realising that this was not done from pure delight, but from the need to cool the scorched lining of the mouth.

The arrival in Mexico of a Spanish bullfighter preceded by a certain reputation used to bring around him a rare collection of people for whom the sight of a torero was in itself a spectacle. As

soon as I got there, I was surrounded by dozens of people whom I didn't know and who gave me no peace. From the station they took me to the hotel; and there in the foyer I had to hold a kind of reception. When I went up to my room, these intimate friends whom I hadn't known for half an hour went up with me; and there I was, trying to talk to all of them while the journalists were trying to get interviews and the photographers were trying to get pictures.

Among them appeared a very stately gentleman with a box under his arm, who greeted me with the greatest cordiality, sat down beside me, and started to gossip about Spain and bullfighting, Pastora Imperio and the brotherhoods of Sevilla, and everything else he could think of that might interest me, all with the greatest of charm. After we had been talking for half an hour, he said, very ceremoniously:

"Well . . . any time you're ready——"

I didn't know what he was talking about; but as I was still determined not to be surprised at anything I replied:

"Oh, yes. You mean——"

"Suppose you come over here and sit on this chair."

I sat down where he wanted me to.

"Take off your shoes."

I took them off.

"And your socks."

I took those off as well.

And with apparent indifference, but with a good many secret qualms, I watched him kneel down, open his box, take hold of one of my feet, and begin to cut my toenails. He was simply a chiropodist, who had somehow got the idea that I wanted his services. It was even more surprising to me, because I had never

suspected that such a simple task called for the collaboration of such a cultured and stately gentleman.

When he had finished he bowed politely and said: "That will be five pesos."

"Here you are," I answered, in the most natural way in the world, as if I had never done anything else but employ chiroprodists.

9

In Mexico I felt for the first time in my life as if I owned the earth.

For the first time I was free from all my old preoccupations. Far away from my family, from my former friends, and from the tormenting feeling of inferiority which had embittered my youth, I was grateful to let myself drift with the current of this pleasant new life, without worrying about anything or caring in the least what anybody thought of me. I was like a boy let out of school. I made new friends among these strange and incomprehensible people, who were so unlike any I had ever known before and yet who were so picturesque and likeable. I came to the conclusion that all Mexicans were slightly mad, and I myself began to feel the fascination of giving way to all the crazy impulses which I had had to curb for so many years. This attitude of mine of being ready for any hare-brained escapade had an excellent effect on the Mexicans, and I found that it was just because I was eccentric that they took me to their hearts. In Mexico I lost my head completely, and I believe that I was still a bit crazy for some time after I returned to Spain.

Among the friends I made were some very wealthy young fellows who lived on a continual spree. The parties they organised

were absolute bacchanales; they spent money like water and drank like fish. I never cared much for drinking; and when I refused to keep on going the rounds of all the drunken orgies in Mexico, they took a substitute along in my name. Naturally, this substitute was Calderón. Sometimes, after being out all night on a jag, they would come crashing into my hotel room in the morning, as tight as drums, and begin to tap-dance and make nonsensical speeches while I stared at them from the bed wide-eyed with wonder. Every day I grew more confirmed in my belief that all Mexicans were potty.

Once one of my friends asked me if I didn't have some diamonds or precious stones to wear, and looked disapproving when I said no. It happened that in Mexico the prestige of bullfighters who came from Spain was measured by the size of their diamonds, and when they saw me without even an inferior stone they began to ask themselves what sort of a torero I really was. They told me that I simply must buy some to satisfy the *aficionados*; and since they thought that I hadn't got any because I couldn't afford it, there was even one mysterious individual who came to me and suggested that he could hire me some to keep up appearances. I didn't see why I should have to waste my money on diamonds, but since I didn't want to be taken for a pauper I adopted a bluff. Whenever anyone came to offer me a stone, I would inspect it disparagingly and hand it back.

"It's too small," I would say. "I'm not interested."

This created a very good impression, and for some time it served to get rid of the innumerable jewellers who pestered me.

This went on until one day a dealer turned up with a diamond that was so enormous that I simply hadn't the nerve to say it was too small, and I was forced to buy it to save my face. When I got home I gave it to my father to flash about in Sevilla. It may seem

exaggerated, but I'm certain that the purchase of that diamond, which I never wore, gave me more standing among the *aficionados* than what I did in the ring.

I soon got to know many important people, most of them army officers and a good many of them generals, for the abruptness and affected manners of Andalucía seemed to take their fancy. They took me to dinner with President Huerta, who wanted to meet me.

One day I was invited to a typical Mexican orgy given by a general on his estate. All the guests, and the general himself, drank like sponges. Presently they pulled out their revolvers and started to amuse themselves by shooting at the empty bottles. At the start I tried to excuse myself by saying that I was no gunman; but they made me try my hand, and by a sheer fluke I scored a brilliant bull's-eye with the first shot. Then they said that I could be nothing less than a professional who had concealed his skill in order to humiliate them; but it all helped to consolidate my reputation as a swashbuckler which was what appealed to them so much.

One of the guests arrived at the party with a very powerful car which he had just bought. The general had another car that was no less powerful, and as soon as they got drunk they began to argue about which was the fastest. The discussion became more heated until it culminated in a challenge to a race round the estate.

The general got into his car, and his mulatto chauffeur took the wheel. As they were about to start, the general looked over the assembled spectators and picked on me.

"Well, torero—will you come with us? Or are you scared?"

"All right," I said, and climbed in.

Providentially there was someone there who foresaw what was likely to happen, and refused to let us start until the top had been taken off the car.

A shot was fired, and off we went. It was a crazy ride. The road round the estate was bad and narrow. The other car had gained the lead at the start and covered us with a cloud of dust without letting us pass. As we crept up, the general became frantic. He thumped his fists on the back of the driver's seat, yelling hoarsely: "Go on, damn you! Faster! Pass him! Don't be a coward!"

We were almost blinded by the dust of the other car. It was impossible to get past. The mulatto strained his eyes into the dusty fog, searching for an opportunity, with his teeth showing in a frozen grin. The time went on, and the general was beside himself. He waved his hands, tore his hair, and went on bawling like a maniac: "Now! Pass him!"

The mulatto remained unperturbed, with his eyes fixed on the road and his mouth open. He managed to gain a little ground, and for a short stretch the two cars were almost joined together. When the other chauffeur realised it, he accelerated and risked a collision with a daring swerve that cut off our advance. Blind with rage, the general hauled out his pistol and stuck it into the back of the mulatto's neck:

"Pass him!" he roared.

Without ceasing to smile, the mulatto flashed a scorching glare at his master and bent over the wheel.

"Now!" screamed the lunatic. "Pass him, or I'll kill you!"

I felt the car rise off the ground. There was a sharp blow, a terrible rending sound, and then a fearful shock that lifted me out of my seat and hurled me into space. We had hit a tree.

I knew nothing more for some time. When I opened my eyes again, my mouth was full of dust and I hadn't the strength to move. Little by little I pulled myself together. I felt myself. No, I wasn't injured. What about the others?

Fifty yards away, the car lay with its four wheels in the air. I dragged myself up with an effort, and saw the general lying unconscious a short distance away. His laboured breathing showed that he hadn't been killed, although he well deserved to have been. I found the mulatto also unconscious and bleeding beside the car. I tried to help them, but there wasn't much I could do. I had to wait until the others came to the rescue. I looked at the car, and shuddered to think what would have happened if we hadn't been thrown out. We certainly owed our lives to the man who had insisted on taking the top off.

Just then I remembered that I still had my camera slung over my shoulder, and it occurred to me to take some pictures of the scene while I was waiting for help. I opened the camera, which was miraculously undamaged, and I was taking some snaps when the other guests rushed up. Their jaws dropped. What sort of a man was I? Who else would ever have had so much *sang-froid*? It gave me more renown than anything I could do with a bull. The Mexicans are like that. They're all potty.

10

In Mexico I discovered another life which was new to me. Sometimes a feminine voice would call me on the telephone.

"Are you Juan Belmonte, the Spanish bullfighter?"

"Yes, madam. What can I do for you?"

"I should be awfully interested to meet you."

"Name the day," I would say impetuously.

A laugh would come over the wire, and presently:

"Oh, that's impossible. I'm a respectable woman, and I should be compromised. You see——"

And then we would go into a long argument, at the end of which she would make an appointment with the greatest secrecy. The rendezvous were usually in the most fantastic places, for the Mexican women—or at least those who telephoned Spanish bull-fighters—had story-book imaginations. One of them made a date with me at midnight by the walls of the French cemetery. Another who called me in the small hours of the morning said:

“Go at once to such and such a street. Leave your carriage at the corner and walk slowly along the right-hand pavement. When you get to a window with a handkerchief tied to the bars, that’s where I shall be. Don’t stop, or speak a word, or it’ll be all up with me. Just walk by and look at me and go away. Will you promise me that?”

I gave her my word, and duly saw her. She was really beautiful. I kissed her, and she hid herself quickly. I went on to the next corner, turned round, and walked back. She returned my kiss and closed the window, and I never saw her again.

These story-book adventures were so new to me that they took my fancy. The same thing happened to all of us—apparently it was a tradition that had been started by our predecessors. Spanish bull-fighters must have had a great reputation with women.

These telephone calls came to be Mexico’s chief attraction for us; and eventually, of course, we started to put on falsetto voices and try to lure each other into keeping entirely mythical assignations.

One day, out of the blue, I was called by a lady who invited me to have supper with her. She told me quite brazenly that she was young and pretty, that she was attracted by my fame as a bull-fighter, and quite shamelessly gave me to understand that she was in love with me. I felt properly flattered; and since I was fighting on the following day, which was Sunday, I arranged to have dinner

with her on Monday night. Afterwards, however, I thought less about the appointment, because a woman who for no good reason said she was in love with you seemed a bit too much to take seriously, and I imagined that it was probably some lady of exceedingly easy virtue or perhaps even some old hag who was reaching the age of desperation. I was so convinced about it that when the appointed time came I had forgotten it completely and I was peacefully playing billiards in the hotel with one of the boys in my cuadrilla and a Mexican torero called Lombardini. I was absorbed in the game when a servant in impeccable livery came up to me and inquired:

"Don Juan Belmonte?"

For some reason I was amused by the idea of pointing to Lombardini, who was chalking his cue on the other side of the table.

"That's Belmonte," I said.

The lackey went up to Lombardini, drew him into a corner, and whispered something to him. Lombardini listened to him, and came over to repeat it to me.

"Look here," he said. "This fellow says there are two women waiting to take you out to dinner. Apparently you made a date with them."

"You can go," I said. "I don't feel in the mood for anything like that tonight. Tell them you're Belmonte and see if they'll believe you."

The suggestion appealed to Lombardini and he went out with the messenger. In a short time he returned enthusiastically.

"They're a couple of beauties, and they've got a magnificent car," he said. "They took me for you all right, and they want me to go along with them."

"Are they really good-looking?"

"They're a sensation!"

The adventure began to intrigue me after all.

"Well, let's get some fun out of it," I said. "You go down and tell them that you're with some friends that you simply can't get rid of, but that we could all go off and have dinner together. I'll go on pretending that you're Juan Belmonte, and you can say that we're your banderilleros. Then we'll see what happens."

Lombardini went out again, and soon came back to fetch us. He presented us to two really gorgeous women who were sitting in the back of a plutocratic car, but they gave us no more than a polite greeting. It seemed to me that they only accepted our company on sufferance. They sat Lombardini down between them, and told us to take a taxi and follow them.

We arrived at a luxuriously furnished mansion, and were taken into a tastefully appointed drawing-room. The woman who had called me on the telephone appeared to be the lady of the house; and I gathered that she was the wife or mistress of some important Mexican, and was taking advantage of one of his absences to enjoy some adventures of her own. The other was probably a confidential friend and partner in her escapades. All the same, I realised at once that her friend was just as eager for adventure as she was herself; and I had to resign myself patiently to watching them compete for the attention of Lombardini.

They gave us a sumptuous dinner. Lombardini sat between them, and throughout the meal they were laughing with him and making all sorts of mischievous insinuations to which he was by no means unresponsive. The banderillero and myself were not in it. We were simply an ignored audience for the suggestive banter of Lombardini and the two ladies.

I didn't give up hope. While we were eating I tried to attract

some of their attention to myself, but they hardly listened to me.

Then I began to talk about Belmonte, hoping that I should be able to say something more interesting and amusing on the subject than Lombardini; but I soon realised that while they were interested in what I was saying, they listened to me with their eyes fixed worshipfully on my accursed substitute.

Lombardini didn't miss any of my dramatic efforts to get myself noticed; and when they weren't looking at him, he winked at me and shrugged his shoulders, as if to say: "You asked for it. It isn't my fault if they like me. You might as well give up fighting about it, because it isn't doing you any good."

Then I started talking about the difference between Juan Belmonte as he appears in the ring and what he looks like at close quarters, to see if that would open their eyes.

"That's absurd," answered the woman who had telephoned me. "Your matador is just what I should have imagined from his photographs and the stories they tell about him."

I was ready to burst into tears. For the amazing thing to me was that the woman had a whole collection of photographs of me which she had cut out of illustrated papers. And she couldn't even look at my face!

When I had to acknowledge that I hadn't a hope of conquering, or perhaps I should say reconquering, the first woman, I reflected that although Lombardini had won her, there was still her friend who was no less attractive and appetising than herself. So I concentrated on this second objective. But it was just a waste of powder and shot. Neither of them had eyes for anyone but the man they thought was Belmonte—while the real Belmonte was sitting at the other end of the table making desperate efforts to get them to even condescend to look at him. Lombardini was grinning like a

"I gave it five smooth and slow verónicas, which were perhaps the best I have done in my life."





"There came a time when I felt myself wrapped up in the bull, melted into one with it."

Cheshire cat, and I was ready to give everything away—to tell the truth, and unmask the impostor.

The thing that stopped me was my pride. I couldn't bear to think that even if I displaced Lombardini he could still get his revenge by pointing out that they had had no use for me as a man without my name; and besides that, they looked so enraptured with him that I even wondered if it would make any difference if I revealed myself as the real Belmonte. Suppose they liked Lombardini for himself, and I just made myself look ridiculous?

The thought drove me frantic. When I couldn't stand it any more, I grabbed the banderillero by the arm and got up.

"Let's go," I said. "We aren't wanted here."

I ran down the stairs, boiling with uncontrollable rage. The two women stayed where they were, vying for the favours of Lombardini. I heard his howl of laughter as I slammed the door furiously on my way out.

That is how women fall in love with bullfighters.

II

I met a demure and delightful girl, the daughter of a strict and well-to-do family, and fell in love with her. She was very young, and her air of modest simplicity captivated me to the point where I was ready to do any number of crazy things for her which I certainly wouldn't have done for any of the so-called *femmes fatales* of the movies. I suppose that however much of the nonsense life may have knocked out of one, there is still a vein of romanticism even in the most sophisticated of us.

I fell so much in love with this girl that when she announced to

me one day, with tears in her eyes, that we must say goodbye because her parents were taking her to America to escape from the revolution, I solemnly swore that I would follow her even if she went to the other end of the world. It was all very novelettish and unreal, but I had taken the part of Romeo so seriously that I was determined to give up everything and go after her.

She was leaving Mexico with her family three or four days before the corrida which I was to fight for my own benefit. This had already been widely advertised; but I decided to go on the same train with her even if the corrida had to be suspended and the heavens fell. It was a catastrophic decision to make, not only from the point of view of the impresario but also from my own. It happened that the impresario held all the money I had earned in Mexico, which he was waiting for a suitable opportunity to change into Spanish currency; and if I broke with him and brought a real financial disaster on him by violating my obligations, he would be in an excellent position to take reprisals. Even that consideration didn't stop me. I dropped him a line telling him that I was going, and that he was to get out of the mess as best he could. I renounced my benefit and everything else.

When the train went out, I was on it. It was a most original kind of elopement, because the girl was in a compartment with her family, very prim and proper, while I was prowling up and down the corridor hoping for nothing better than a tender glance.

Fortunately, lovers as well as drunkards have a special providence that watches tirelessly over them. In this case, providence provided for me one of those parties of revolutionaries who were always banding together against the government. A few miles from Mexico City, the train finally stopped at a station where the travellers were informed that the rebels had cut the line a little

further on, and we could either return to the capital or wait until the situation changed. So I had to go back to Mexico City after all, and on account of this accident my benefit corrida was happily celebrated and in due course I returned normally to Spain.

The curious thing is that my infatuation flickered out almost immediately afterwards. In a few months I could hardly remember what the girl looked like.

12

In the fifteen or twenty corridas which I fought in Mexico that season, I was paired with Rodolfo Gaona in eight or ten. I think that the success of my tour was largely due to this keen competition. The bullfighting public always likes the stimulus of rivalry between two toreros, and encourages it and exalts it to the limit. It is things like that which produce the passionate partisanship of *aficionados* which is the best atmosphere for the fiesta.

I have always made use of this stimulus of rivalry, even though the public sometimes creates it arbitrarily; but at the same time I have tried to keep the competition within certain limits of sportsmanship and fair play which seem to me indispensable. I believe I was successful in this during my stay in Mexico, and my greatest pride was that Gaona himself acknowledged it.

From November to February I fought almost without interruption, not only in the capital, but also in Puebla, Veracruz, Guadalajara, San Luis de Potosí, and Nogales; and in spite of the violent dissension of the *aficionados*, and the fact that Gaona himself was a Mexican, I am told that only the unfortunate Montes had acquired such a devoted following in Mexico as I did.

I only had one contretemps, in a city where I refused to fight because I had good reason to fear that the impresario wouldn't pay me, for which refusal I was arrested and taken to prison. I was only gored twice, once in Mexico City and again in Nogales, through which I had to miss six corridas that had been contracted for.

On the 20th of February I started back for Spain with my cuadrilla; and I must say that I was sorry to go. In those turbulent years of 1913 and 1914 the Mexicans seemed to be launched on the adventure of a radical transformation. The insecurity in which they lived, the dramatic developments of new ideas in their hot heads, the awakening of popular passions, and at the same time the supreme contempt for life of these people who were ready to kill or be killed in any cause—the whole conflict stirred up by civilisation in their fundamentally Indian minds, all gave the country a garish vitality by which I found myself strangely attracted. These brave people, loyal to their friends and merciless to their enemies, who were cruel to such an extreme that the most horrible atrocities seemed like childish pranks to them, completely fascinated me.

I remember how one day when we were supposed to take a train to some place where we were fighting, we learned from a newspaper that on the previous day a revolutionary general had blown up a train on that line and killed several travellers.

"Shan't we be able to go?" we asked the impresario.

"Oh, yes," he replied. "There's no danger. I've just heard that the general who blew up the train yesterday has made friends with the government again. He's promised not to blow up any more trains, and the line is working again quite normally."

This was unheard-of barbarism; and yet in my bewildered eyes it had a certain epic grandeur. I don't know what a sociologist would have thought of it; but I was just a torero, to whom this

public that loved danger and audacity and bravado more than anything else was the ideal.

When I got back to Spain I felt homesick for Mexico. Spain, in contrast, signified repression, the rein on the instincts, tact, prudence, tenacity, the sense of continuity; and my tastes had all developed in the opposite direction.

13

It was a tradition in Sevilla that all bullfighters who went to Mexico should bring back a parrot. I brought back several. Even as a boy I had observed that there was always a parrot in the patios of the houses where famous bullfighters lived, to bear irrefutable witness to a campaign in Mexico, and I didn't want to be lacking in that requisite. I began by buying a pair of them; but on the day I left I was fairly mobbed by sellers of parrots, and I bought as many as they offered me—as much to save myself the trouble of getting rid of them as for the vanity of taking back a souvenir for every one of my friends. Those parrots, whose voyage to Spain cost me more than their weight in gold, travelled in the hold of the steamer; and every day I had to go below to look after them and lavish on them an endless amount of petting and attention without which I was told they would pine away and die. Then it turned out that all my parrots were either dumb or became that way out of spite, and none of the friends and relatives to whom I gave them was ever able to drag a single word out of the little beasts.

I also had some rare cats and Chihuahua dogs which are famous for their diminutive size. Calderón had undertaken to buy me one of these puppies, but he must have been cheated, because during the

voyage the puppy he had bought grew so big that when it got to Sevilla it was almost a mastiff.

With my parrots, my cats, my Chihuahuas, my magnificent diamond, and a great air of eccentricity, I made my triumphal entry into Spain. I disembarked at La Coruña, where I was met by my father and a few friends who were flabbergasted by my menagerie and my Mexican extravagances. I went straight to Sevilla to show it all off; because the most important place in the world to me was still the Altozano, and what I was looking forward to most was exhibiting my blasé familiarity with distant lands.

Sevilla gave me an enthusiastic reception. The people had all thrilled to the newspaper accounts of the first venture abroad of their own personal hero, the legendary Juan Belmonte, to whose make-up every one of them believed that he had contributed something.

As soon as I got out of the train I was swallowed up by the crowd which packed the platform. The whole town seemed to be there. Outside the station, there were thousands of people making themselves hoarse with shouts of "*Viva Belmonte!*" They took hold of me bodily and dragged me through the town, picking me up at intervals and waving me over their heads like a banner.

As we passed in front of the church of Santa Ana it occurred to someone to try and fetch out the platform on which the image of the Virgin was carried through the streets in the processions of Holy Week, to carry me on it into Triana. There were a handful of lunatics to whom this seemed an excellent idea, and they poured into the church to put it into execution. The sacristan was terrified and called the priest, who was furious at this sacrilegious proposal. With shouts and threats he managed to keep them away from their objective.

"Sacrilege! I'll call the Guardia Civil to drive you out of this church. The platform of the Virgin to carry a bullfighter! Horror of horrors! Who ever heard of such blasphemy?"

At length the holy indignation of the priest and the threat of the Guardia Civil drove them out. They say that the unfortunate priest almost died of apoplexy.

It is also said that when the church had been cleared of the mob, when the doors had been bolted and the priest could at last sink wearily into a chair in the sacristy, he pulled out his handkerchief and mopped his steaming brow while he still went on dolefully muttering: "Sacrilege! The platform of the Virgin to carry Belmonte! What barbarity!"

He paused, and added: "If only it had been for Joselito!"

14

In 1914 began my rivalry with Joselito; or perhaps it would be better to say the rivalry between the Gallists and Belmontists. I began fighting in Barcelona on the 15th of March, where I was paired with Joselito; and we stayed together for the next five corridas which were held there, and in those of Castellón and Valencia. The impresarios insisted on keeping us together, and it was an arrangement which satisfied the public. They seemed determined to establish a parallel, which in my opinion was impossible.

At that time Joselito was a formidable rival. His youthful vigour had never known what it was to suffer a set-back. Providence had lifted him to the top almost without his feeling the effort. It had all been like a delightful game to him; and this had made him a

spoilt and self-willed boy who treated other mortals with the natural arrogance of a young god. In the arena he was motivated by the legitimate vanity of always wanting to be the first; and this made him put everything he had into his work, with a gallant generosity that could rarely be surpassed. In comparison with him, I was bound to look like an ordinary mortal making pathetic efforts to achieve the same result.

The first time we met was at a tentadero. He had been invited with all the honours, as a novillero of standing who was the pet of the ranchers, while I was just one of the common herd of *aficionados*. When I went up to a calf with the muleta in my hand, I heard him shout after me:

“Not there, sonny! It’ll catch you!”

Without turning my head or changing my position, I cited the calf again.

“It’ll catch you!” repeated Joselito.

The animal charged, and I duly went up into the air. I picked myself lamely off the ground, collected the muleta again, and returned to cite the calf in exactly the same position as before. It happened that, just as I wanted, the animal passed this time without touching me, controlled by the folds of the cloth; and I stood my ground and gave it five or six passes which thrilled the spectators. Only then did I raise my eyes to where Joselito was.

“I knew it was going to catch me,” I said. “The fun was to try and play it there.”

He turned his back on me and stalked away. It was natural and logical that Joselito should be like that in those days. Afterwards, he went on changing, and so did I. The youthful insolence of that pampered child of fortune, and my fierce hunger for success, gave way to the devoted fellowship of two men who shared the same

dangers and the same struggles. My friendship with Joselito in his last years is one of the most moving chapters of my life.

On the 12th of April I fought in Sevilla, and on the 13th in Madrid, without much luck in either corrida. The poor Belmontists were crestfallen. Two days later, when I was fighting in Murcia, a bull gave me such a beating that I was put to bed with my chest aching from the effects of a terrific blow with the flat of its horns, bruises all over my body, and a painful swelling in my left foot. I was contracted to alternate with Joselito in the bullfights of the Feria in Sevilla; and when the word went round that I shouldn't be able to appear, the Gallists claimed a victory and took it for granted that my injuries were simply a pretext to evade the encounter with their idol. The impresario, who knew better than anyone how eager Sevilla was to see me in competition with Joselito, urged me to get there as soon as I could.

I missed the first two corridas of the Feria, which were the easiest, because it was simply impossible for me to stand on my feet; but I was determined to appear for the corrida of Miura bulls, because my detractors, who were increasing in the same proportion as my enthusiasts, had started the rumour that I was avoiding the Miura strain.* When it was announced that I would fight the Miura corrida, there were many who thought that it was one of the impresario's publicity stunts. Bets were made about whether I would fight or not; and when at last I did appear in the arena, the excitement rose to fever pitch.

The first bull that fell to me was almost unplayable. I opened my cape, and at the first pass it hooked the hat from my head and sent it spinning into the stands. I was ready to take any chances;

* Miura bulls are the only breed which keep their eyes open throughout the charge, and are therefore extremely difficult and dangerous.

and since my enemies were saying that I could only fight with my right hand, I used my left for all my work with the muleta, which according to the critics was irreproachable. I was equally fortunate with my second bull, and at the end of the corrida I was once again made to taste the intoxication of triumph. It was one of the great days of my career.

In those days bullfights had a far-reaching importance which they have lost today. A good faena was not finished at the moment when the mules dragged out the bull: in fact, it was when the *aficionados* left the bullring that it really began to distinguish itself and gathered life and colour from the lips of the enthusiastic spectators, who described it over and over again down to the smallest details. At that time you used to see people repeating the faena in the streets. "He did it like this," they would be saying; and the culminating pass would be imitated and discussed by parties in the cafés, by pedestrians who stopped on the edge of the pavement, by ushers in the corridors of government buildings and by priests in their sacristies. For a week after a good corrida nobody talked about anything else. Everybody was a fan; and although it is possible that there were fewer spectators than there are today, a corrida would spread out of the bullring and fill not only the town but the whole country. The *aficionado* of today is only an *aficionado* while he is in his seat. When he leaves the bullring he has other preoccupations, and the great faena is speedily forgotten. But in those days the supporters of different bullfighters lived for nothing but their heroes. In the evening they would be waiting impatiently for the newspapers to come out so that they could learn what their favourite bullfighter had done. If he had done well, his supporters would inflate their chests and go out looking for trouble with the newspaper under their arms. If he had



"I used my left for all my work with the muleta . . ."

been doing badly, the paper would be solemnly folded again; they would say goodnight to each other, and go home to wait for a better day.

On the night of that Miura corrida, the Belmontists went out on the war-path. One group of them went to the fair to celebrate. The Gallists had a club tent in the fair, and the Belmontists went there to strut challengingly up and down in front of it. It was not very full, for the Gallists had gone home to bed after they heard the news. The boldest of the Belmontists put his head in the entrance and called out: "Come along, gentlemen, it's closing time."

When I went out to fight with Rafael El Gallo and Joselito in Madrid on the 2nd of May, the atmosphere was so tense that it frightened me. My triumph in Sevilla had aggravated the bitterness of my enemies and the enthusiasm of my supporters to such an extreme that the stands were filled with a stormy sea of humanity in which every now and again local quarrels and brawls broke like waves. Many *aficionados* had paid as much as eight or ten duros for seats that had been sold at the box-office for as many pesetas.

The corrida proceeded normally, in spite of the general irritability and nervous tension, until the fifth bull came out. It fell to Joselito; and from the time he opened his cape until he killed it with one superb sword-thrust there was absolute delirium. It was a great faena from start to finish—complete, versatile, courageous, and lovely to see. No one could have asked for more, and the public applauded him to the echo. After the bull had been dragged out, Joselito ran two or three times round the ring; I don't know how many. Whenever it seemed as if the ovation was dying down it would break out again somewhere else. With his hat in his hand, Joselito had to take a thousand curtains from the centre of the arena.

All this time, I was sitting on the step of the barrera waiting for my bull. A friend told me that he was watching me during that time, trying to guess what was going on in my mind. He thought that while Joselito was receiving the wildest ovation that had ever been given to a torero, he recognised in me the grim concentration of a man who was desperately resolving to surpass the unsurpassable. He didn't believe me when I told him that my concentration was really due to a little superstition that I had. I am not very superstitious; but the most sensible and level-headed man, when he has to gamble everything in a game like bullfighting, a game in which so many things are beyond the control of his courage and intelligence and will-power, is bound to fall into a respect for some of these trifling auspices.

What had happened was that a hair on my leg had worked out through my silk stocking, and that seemed like a bad omen. All my concentration was devoted to trying to put it back. If I was successful, it was certain that I should triumph.

Eventually my bull came out, and from the first pass with the cape I had a perfect sensation of dominance. As I went on fighting, I remembered less and less of the violence and danger of bullfighting. It seemed to me that what I was doing was a graceful game, an amusing recreation of body and spirit, rather than a heroic and terrible exercise. I had that day more than on any other the feeling of playing which a torero has when he is really fighting well. I called the bull and drew it towards my body, making it pass so that it brushed against me, as if that trembling furiously-turning bulk which shook the arena with the thunder of its hooves and slashed the air with its sharp horns was something soft and harmless. To convert the powerful and perilous reality of the animal into something that seems as impalpable as

a veil held in the hands of a dancer is the great marvel of bullfighting.

Throughout the faena I was unconscious of danger or effort. The bull and I were complementary elements, each of us moved by the prompting of our different instincts; we were tracing on the sands of the arena the pure scrolls and arabesques of the art. The bull was subject to me as I was to it. There came a time when I felt myself wrapped up in the bull, melted into one with it. After the corrida, I found that my costume was covered with the hairs which it had brushed off against me as it passed. I have never fought with so much delight; and the public realised it.

They said that I fought that day as no one had ever fought before.

15

I have said that I have no superstitions, but it is true that I am sometimes influenced by the superstitions of people around me. The bullfighting world is particularly enslaved by this irrational anxiety to pin down destiny with its omens. The bullfighter, who in spite of what most people believe is just an ordinary man with ordinary doubts and hesitations, is always an easy victim for anything that serves to give him confidence, so that he is usually bowed under the weight not only of his own superstitions but of those of everyone else he talks to.

When I was dressing for the corrida of the 2nd of May, I discovered that Antonio, my *mozo de espadas*, was binding my feet with some bandages that were not very clean. I told him to take them off and get some clean ones.

"You shut up and leave me alone," he replied. "I know what

I'm doing. These bandages may be dirty, but they're lucky. I'm telling you."

When one is dressing for a corrida, one hasn't the nerve to defy any superstition; so I shrugged my shoulders and let him have his way.

The corrida was a triumph.

"You see?" said Antonio, when he was joyfully undressing me afterwards. "The bandages! It was the lucky bandages!"

Needless to say, he kept on putting on the same bandages every day after that, in spite of the fact that they were a bit dirtier every time; and I didn't dare to refuse them. I was wearing the same miraculous bandages one day when a Santa Coloma bull gored me in the thigh. As I was being carried away to the infirmary with the blood soaking my breeches, I saw Antonio behind the barrera. I turned back and shouted at him: "Now look what your filthy bandages have done!"

But there never has been and never will be a man more tormented by omens than my manager, Juan Manuel. Everything, even the slightest triviality, was to him a forecast of good or bad fortune. He was supposed to see me every day; but sometimes when he didn't turn up and I called him on the phone, he would answer lugubriously:

"I can't come."

"Why not?"

"Because when I went out I ran into a one-eyed man, and I had to turn round and go back to bed, or else something terrible would have happened."

He had a special hat for going to bullfights. It was a terrible hat, but it brought good luck. On his watch-chain he had a little silver tortoise, and while I was fighting he had to keep on touching

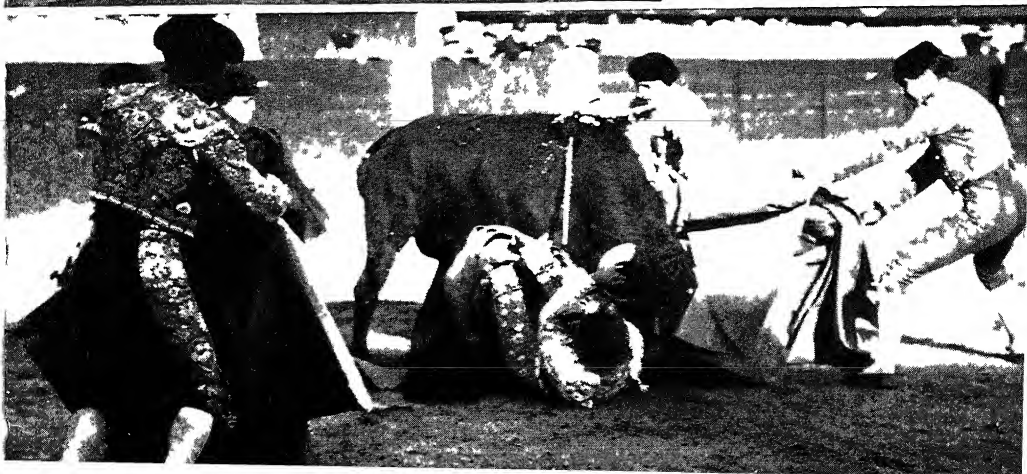
it. Once, in La Linea, he started to look for his tortoise at the moment when I opened my cape and couldn't find it. He told me that he immediately covered his eyes and waited in terror until he heard the shriek from the audience which told him that, as was bound to happen, the bull had caught me. He took a dislike to some little plaster statues which I had, and never stopped pestering me about them until one day he caught me weak and convalescing and took advantage of it to get my permission to take them away. Afterwards he told me that he had given them to a Belgian, who was glad to accept them and laughed at his superstitions; but that in a few days the poor Belgian suffered so many calamities that he was glad to get rid of them himself. According to him, they next fell into the hands of a porter, whose family was immediately overtaken by misfortune. Nobody could have convinced Juan Manuel that his removal of the statuettes hadn't saved my life.

Without denying that such typical bullfighters' superstitions haven't impressed me at times, I can say that I have never taken them very seriously. If there is one superstition against which I cannot fight, it is my own private one of deliberately flouting them. I feel that by doing that I am taking destiny by the horns. I have told how the ideal faena of my dreams when I wanted to be a bullfighter invariably ended with the bull goring me in the thigh. This goring which I have always looked forward to so fervently has saved me from many others. My firmest conviction, my superstition if you like, is that it's no use trying to keep out of trouble. It is better to offer yourself boldly for destiny to do its worst. If I can think about a misfortune until it becomes a familiar companion, and if I have enough courage to live it in all its intensity in my imagination, I have beaten it before it happens.



An *adorno* may literally mean taking the bull by the horn, but the matador will still have a chance to defend himself if the bull makes a sudden movement.

Another of Belmonte's gorings, for those who think that "the bull doesn't have a chance"





An incomparable *pase de pecho*, so close that the bull brushing past will leave its loose hairs on Belmonte's costume.

A few very complex calculations about the law of compensation, in which I usually lose my way; the faith in an inherent justice which distributes good and bad equitably, although sometimes the equity may not be apparent to us; and above all, this conviction that you must look adversity in the face if you want to scare it away, make up the whole of my philosophy. Any other metaphysical ideas are too complicated for me. I would rather believe that one-eyed men are unlucky.

16

During the season of 1914 I fought almost daily. After being injured in Madrid I reappeared on the 24th of May in Oviedo; on the 26th I was in Madrid again, on the 27th in Córdoba, on the 30th once more in Madrid, and on the 31st in Linares, where I received a wound in the eyebrow. In June I started on the 5th in Valencia, and on the 7th and 8th I fought again in Madrid. I fought three corridas in Granada, and three in Algeciras; and on the 24th, in Bilbao, a bull gave me a blow with the side of its horn which put me out of action until the 4th of July, when I appeared again in Zaragoza. On the following day I fought in Barcelona, after which I took part in the three consecutive corridas of San Fermín in Pamplona. I went on fighting almost without a break in La Coruña, Oviedo, Gijón, La Linea, Barcelona, and the four bullfights of the Feria in Valencia. In August I travelled between the bullrings of San Sebastián, Vitoria, Santander, Huesca and Bilbao, where after fighting three corridas in succession I fell ill. I was in bed for five days; and on the sixth I turned out again in Almagro, after which I went on to fight in Almería and Linares.

I took part in two corridas in Málaga, two in Mérida, another two in Salamanca, more than one in Murcia, and another in Albacete. I went to Lisbon, and afterwards to Valladolid, Oviedo, Barcelona, Madrid and Sevilla, where I suffered another injury which lost me eight fights. During that season I killed one hundred and fifty-nine bulls.

17

When the season ended, I was rather tired of bullfighting, I felt that I had to get away from the curiosity of the public and live as I wanted to, as far removed as possible from the bullfighting world. My ideal was to live like any other boy of my age with independent means, and to do that I decided to go to Madrid.

The year before, on the strength of my first success, I had tried to live comfortably in Sevilla, but I was allowed to have no private life. For instance, when I left the miserable little courtyard where I had lived before and moved into more comfortable quarters, it occurred to me to purchase a bath. This simple action became the sensation of the quarter. "It's Belmonte's bath!" chattered all the gossips; and they swarmed round the door of my house while it was being unloaded from the cart and taken in. Another time I bought a horse; and when it was brought ready saddled to the door, all the loafers in the district gathered round to see me mount it. When I went out for a ride my friends kept on stopping me, and one of them always finished by climbing up behind me. Sometimes there were three of us loaded up on the unfortunate animal. The horse couldn't have enjoyed belonging to a popular bullfighter, because one day it got tired of us and bolted. It ran into a wall

and was killed. I think it committed suicide. And yet I wasn't much better off than the horse.

Naturally, there were compensations. Once I rode out on my horse to see a pilgrimage. When the pilgrims saw me go by on my prancing steed, they recognised me and cheered me. When I returned to Triana I was escorted by an enthusiastic crowd who wanted to make me ride into the monastery of San Jacinto, horse and all. The friars, of course, were not in favour of this; and there was a real battle at the entrance between the friars and the Belmontists, who wanted to anoint me in the temple in some original and unheard-of consecration. I had to make my escape at full gallop.

Another day I was on my way back to Sevilla when at one station we discovered that there was a Cabinet Minister travelling on the same train. His admirers in the village had prepared an enthusiastic welcome for him. A brass band was drawn up outside his compartment, surrounded by hundreds of villagers who were cheering for "the saviour of Spain."

"Shall we take the crowd away?" suggested a friend who was with me.

It was no sooner said than done. He got down on to the platform and started to shout: "Belmonte! Here's Belmonte! *Viva Belmonte!*"

In a few seconds the hundreds of people who had gathered at the station to do homage to the "saviour of Spain" were cheering under the window of my compartment; and all the minister had left was the mayor and the six musicians in the brass band, who were blowing away with their heads turned towards where I was.

An anecdote which Natalio Rivas tells against himself belongs to the same period. He says that he was once browsing about the

second-hand book market in Valencia when he was approached by a bookseller who had seen him there several times and thought he knew him. Don Natalio told him his name, and the bookseller exclaimed:

"Oh, yes. I thought I knew you. You're the politician who is a great friend of Belmonte."

All this was very flattering, but in the end it became a nuisance. For this reason I decided to escape to Madrid, where I could live like an ordinary human being. I rented a studio to which I invited no other friends than the group of intellectuals whom I had met through Sebastián Miranda; and one day I went into a barber shop and had my pigtail cut off.

Part Four:

—AND THE PRICE

—AND THE PRICE

I

ON the day of a corrida, the beard grows faster. It's fear. During the hours before a fight, one is so keyed up that the whole organism is stimulated to an abnormal acceleration of all its functions. I don't know whether a doctor would confirm it, but there is no doubt in any torero's mind.

Fear. I know it so well. It is my constant companion.

It's not so hard to shake it off the night before. It never disturbs my sleep, because I can keep my mind busy thinking about remote and unimportant things. Since I haven't a great deal of imagination, I go to bed and pretend that I'm watching a sort of fantastic film, always the same; and this mental scarecrow is sufficient to shut everything else out of my mind until I fall asleep.

But in the morning it's not so easy. Fear is there, sitting over me in the bed, as soon as I open my eyes. Antonio knows it well. If no man can be a hero to his own valet, it's even more hopeless for a torero to be a hero to his *mozo de espadas*.

I don't know what happens to other toreros. I myself have to fight this spectre of Fear in a fierce imaginary debate, while I lie there waiting until it's time to get up.

"Well," says Fear cheerfully. "Here you are waiting to have your guts ripped out by a bull."

"Really," I answer. "I don't think that will happen——"

"All right, all right. There you are. I'm only talking to you

as a friend. You've been tempting fortune for quite a long time."

"It's not just fortune. I know how to fight bulls."

"Sometimes the bull wins, you know. Why do you have to run these absurd risks?"

"I'm under contract——"

"What does a contract mean? The only serious obligation you have is to go on living. Don't be silly."

"I've got to go."

"Do you think the world will come to an end if you don't?"

"The world won't come to an end, but the public will think badly of me."

"Do you care what they think? Do you believe that in five or ten years anyone will remember what they thought of you today?"

"Yes, they'll remember. You've got to live honourably until the end. I owe it to my reputation. The *aficionados* will remember for many years that there was a courageous bullfighter——"

"Within a few years, at the best, there won't be any *aficionados*. Are you sure that the next generation will care about the courage of a bullfighter? Who told you that bullfighting is never going to be abolished? Even now the socialist government——"

"That may be true——"

"Of course it's true. Why not pretend that it's happened already? Don't fight any more."

"No, no. It hasn't happened yet."

"Is that your fault? Why should you suffer for what the government has failed to do? Why should you risk your skin for a few thousand pesetas which you don't really need?"

"I fight because I like it."

"You don't know what you like. You'd like to go into the country and hunt. You'd like to sit quietly down and read. You'd

like to fall in love. There are so many beautiful women in the world! And this evening, when you're lying stretched out and cold, they will still be beautiful, and they will be giving their favours to other men who were more sensible than you. . . ."

At this point one is profoundly depressed. One tries to find an escape.

"Yes, you're right. It's a stupid business. Perhaps I don't really enjoy it any more. As soon as I've completed my contracts I'll give it up."

"How do you know that you'll live that long?"

"All right. I'll just fight the two or three corridas that I can't get out of."

"Two or three corridas are plenty of time for a bull to get you. Even this afternoon——"

"All right, I said! I'm going to fight this afternoon even if I know that I'll never come out alive."

For a while I am master of myself again; but my nerves are on edge. I get angry with Antonio for the slightest reason and start to quarrel bitterly with him. Anything will do for an excuse. He knows what is happening, and bows before the storm. Little by little he lures me into my costume. The hours go by, until shortly before it is time to go to the ring my friends begin to arrive. As soon as the first one comes, however intimate a friend he may be, Fear has to be crushed out of sight. But the struggle goes on. To be courageous in the corrida, you must have conquered Fear before you go into the arena. And probably the thing that gives the final victory is nothing but the sordid necessity of making a living. I don't believe that any torero, even the most courageous, wouldn't be glad to back out at the last moment if someone would guarantee him an income without obliging him to fight. At any rate, there

would be no professional bullfighters. Perhaps there would be occasional ones; there will always be men who are ready to gamble their lives on the impulse of the moment. But the professional bullfighter, who goes to the bullring almost every day like a carpenter going to his shop, or a painter to his easel, wouldn't exist.

Nor would one fight if one had to contract for a corrida two hours before it started. One fights because the contracts are signed weeks or months before they have to be fulfilled, when the day is so far away that it seems unreal.

On one occasion I was putting on my costume when Antonio told me that there were some impresarios who wanted to see me—they were offering three contracts for different bullrings on very attractive terms. And yet I could only think of them as treacherous criminals.

"Throw them out," I said to Antonio.

And when he came back I went on: "Why didn't you throw them out in the beginning? Don't you know by now that I'm not going to fight any more this season?"

The impresarios took no notice of either of us, being old hands in the game. They waited calmly until I came back from the corrida, full of my own triumph. They caught me in the hall of the hotel as soon as I came in, and I signed all the contracts they wanted.

When I find myself in front of the bull, it's quite different. A bull gives you no time for introspection. All your faculties are taken up with watching it. In the arena, there is only one moment to spare for self-examination—the few minutes which the matador has to himself while the banderillas are being placed. What he does afterwards, is the result of that moment of meditation. When

he takes up the sword and muleta, he instinctively follows the subconscious form of a plan which he has worked out in detail long before. In front of the bull he has no doubts. The exercise is so absorbing, so vital, that in my opinion any faltering of decision before the horns of the bull is fatal.

2

In the season of 1915 I was contracted for a hundred and fifteen corridas, of which I fought ninety. In sixtyeight of them I was paired with Joselito, for our rivalry still went on. We began the season together in Málaga, and afterwards we went on together to the bullfights of the Feria in Sevilla. The third of these was the corrida of Miura bulls; and in it I achieved an even greater success, if possible, than I had the year before. Again they carried me shoulder-high to Triana; and as we passed over the bridge I had a feeling of fulfilment which was one of the most thrilling moments of my life.

My most outstanding performance during that season was the charity corrida in Madrid on the 25th of April, a glorious date in the annals of those people who called themselves Belmontists, who because they are generous have idealised the episodes of my life, which is really not so different from many others. No life that is worthy of the name consists of anything but a continual series of efforts to build up a character through the medium of whatever struggle one has adopted for a career.

But apart from such supreme moments, to which the generosity of one's friends and admirers frankly tends to give an exaggerated and disproportionate importance, the life of a bullfighter ordinarily

follows the same monotonous calendar as that of any other professional man. Year after year, it goes on something like this:

Spring. Beginning of the season. The torero is confronted again with the bull "with whiskers" which he has not seen since the year before: at the best, he has only played with the beardless becerros in a round-up. Naturally he isn't very cheerful. There is a long time between corridas, from Sunday to Sunday. If the corrida was good, the week is happy; he goes to theatres and supper parties. If the corrida was bad, the week is gloomy: he has no interest in anything, and is only waiting for the next Sunday to give him a chance to vindicate himself. It is wonderful how his confidence is renewed with each corrida. Naturally there are gloomy weeks which last for months, in which he may be unable to make a recovery.

The summer begins. The great Ferias in the large towns. Series of three or four corridas. Comfortable journeys. Good hotels. the torero is accompanied by a group of friends, who travel with him and live in the same hotels, and share his good and bad times. If the torero has a bad afternoon, he stays in his room afterwards with his friends. They discuss the incidents of the day's fighting. Usually they blame the bull. Other times they blame the public, or call it just a run of bad luck. Sometimes they blame the torero—when he isn't listening.

It isn't long before the torero says: "I feel rather tired. I don't think I feel like going down to the dining-room."

His friends understand. They suggest sending down for dinner and having it together in the room. Afterwards they may play a quiet game of cards.

On the other hand, if the corrida was good, the torero's room is seething with *aficionados*. There are smiles, jokes, smacks on

the back. The torero doesn't feel tired. He goes down to the dining-room, and afterwards they go to a theatre or a cabaret where there are women to see and be seen by. Like a soldier in war time, or anyone else who is living dangerously, a bullfighter is always preoccupied with women. The sexual explanation is simple enough.

September. Ferias in the villages, with one or two corridas. Fighting every day. Travelling every night, a part of the day as well. Excursion trains, village inns, soot, dust, heat. The same struggles with hunger as in the days of his apprenticeship. On bullfighting days, of course, the torero must not eat in the morning, in case he should later receive a wound in the stomach; in the evening he eats an enormous meal to make up for it. But in these hectic days he has little opportunity to eat properly. He drinks vast quantities of water. His digestion goes to pieces.

Feeling like a sleepwalker, he travels backwards and forwards over the length and breadth of Spain. Now he is alone with his cuadrilla. His friends can't keep up with this mad dashing from place to place. He reaches his room in what the village calls a "hotel" on the very day of the fight, after fifteen hours' travelling. The village *aficionados* come in. There are welcomes and embraces. They all sit down and talk.

"You've had a wonderful season. Thirtytwo ears!* . . . You're easily the best of anybody this year . . . You've been making So-and-so look silly!"

There are anecdotes. They recall the goring in the thigh, the blow on the mouth, the memorable faenas. The torero looks longingly at the bed, yawns.

* The torero is awarded the ear of a bull with which the public considers that he has made an exceptionally good display.

"Perhaps I'd better lie down," he says timidly. "We've had a tiring journey."

"Go ahead. Lie down and have a rest. You don't have to stand on ceremony with us."

The torero undresses and gets into bed. The conversation languishes. He shuts one eye, opens it and shuts the other. He tells the *mozo de espadas* to close the shutters. At last the *aficionados* go away. The torero drowzes, listening to the barrel-organ in the street, the footsteps of the fair-goers, the clatter of dishes downstairs which reminds him of his own fast. Presently he dreams—probably that a socialist government has abolished bullfighting, that the bullrings have been burned down, and the bulls have been sent to the slaughter-house. . . .

Soon enough, reality returns. The *mozo de espadas* taps him on the shoulder, tells him it is time to get up. The torero glares at him savagely. The *mozo de espadas* looks the other way.

The *aficionados* return to watch the dressing. They are animated, cheerful with the hope of seeing a good *corrida*. The air becomes thick with their cigar smoke. Their enthusiasm infects the torero.

"Let's see how you do today."

"What do you mean—how he'll do? He's better every time."

"If they give you an ear, let me have it to shake under the nose of someone in our café who doesn't appreciate you."

The torero smiles understandingly. He makes a mental resolution to win an ear for this good fellow. He knows the tragedy of the *aficionado* in a village where there is only one *corrida* a year and his idol does badly in it. He has to suffer the jibes of his friends for the next twelve months. Sometimes the torero is able to carry out his resolution. Other times, naturally, he can't; and on that depends whether the return of the *aficionados* to the hotel is

ebullient or depressed. In Sevilla there used to be a blind man who could tell exactly how a bullfighter had fared from the noise that came from his room after a fight.

The return to the station. Boarding a train at three o'clock in the morning. The travellers have put out the lights, taken off their shoes, and stretched themselves out on the seats. The invasion of the bullfighting world rudely disturbs their sleep. Twentyseven toreros, two thousand bags, capes, jars of water, the leg armour of the picadors. Voices. "There's room for four here." "This compartment is almost empty." "Here's room for two." "Don't leave that bag behind." The other travellers fume and glare. They also have something to say. "There's no room for any more in here." "After you've finished treading all over me——" "What are you doing with that bag?" "Take that damn basket into the corridor!"

The train gets going. All the travellers are wide awake now. The glare dies out of their eyes. Before long they are making overtures. "Would you like a cigar?" "Who was fighting today?" "How did it go?" "Where are you fighting tomorrow?" "You must be tired. If you'd like to stretch your legs I can move." "No, it doesn't matter a bit—I've got nothing to do tomorrow." I think that the torero, outside the ring, wins most people's sympathy. And fundamentally it is because they see how weak he is under his brilliance, like a puppet with his life hanging by a thread.

The autumn draws on. Again there are long intervals between corridas, and their significance becomes doubly dramatic for the torero. Now they are not only a part of the struggle for life and fame; each one is a step towards a well-earned rest, towards the winter.

The winter means the life of the little farm; the logs burning on the hearth; the smell of thyme; the clink of spurs and the rattle of horseshoes; the tinkle of cattle bells; dogs barking in the silence of the night. The exhilarating gallop after a becerro, and the shock of the lance which spills it feet upwards on the ground. Greyhounds and hares. The leap of the shot stag. And bed—all the bed he wants.

At last the chestnut has ripened and fallen from the tree. The last corrida. The torero gives a sigh of satisfaction until the spring. He thinks that this satisfaction will last until then. But presently he begins to have his doubts . . .

3

In 1915 I was a little bit off my head. The accelerated rhythm of my life in the few years before, and the upheaval of success, had worn me out and left me listless and disinterested in everything. I read a lot, making great efforts to understand and digest everything that fell into my hands; much of it belonged to that twisted and unhealthy kind of literature which was then in vogue. This wore me out even more; and although I often threw the book away in a fit of irritation, I was always drawn back to it by a sort of morbid fascination. This reading had such an effect on my state of mind that I began to think of committing suicide. I kept a pistol on my bedside table; and often I found myself playing with it as if I had already decided to blow out my brains. Then I would pull myself together and ask myself why I should go through all those pantomimes when I knew that I hadn't the courage to kill myself. And yet it was an obsession that I couldn't get rid of.

I took to going to the most absurd and fantastic places, drawn to them only by whatever sinister and melodramatic atmosphere they might have. In the small hours of the morning I would prowls the outskirts of the town in search of impossible adventures. One night I went with Antonio de la Villa to a dreadful house in the Calle de Ceres. We argued and bargained with some frightful women. When I found myself alone with one of them, I was overwhelmed with a confused sensation of disgust and misery. I threw her some money and ran away.

On one occasion I was invited to visit the asylum of Dr Esquerdo to see one of their patients. He was an *aficionado*, quite a boy, whose insanity had taken the form of an obsessing hatred for myself and my bullfighting; he had been under treatment for some time, and they thought that it might help his convalescence if he saw me and talked to me in the flesh.

I went there one afternoon with Sebastián Miranda and another friend. The Director was out at the moment, and one of his staff asked us to wait for him. While we were sitting around there, we saw various people come in and go out, without knowing whether they were lunatics or keepers; and I began to feel a horrible uneasiness. Why had I gone there? What was I looking for? Was it because I was starting to go mad?

I was struck with the idea that my friends had lured me there in order to leave me in custody. It was so absurd that I didn't dare to suggest it, but the idea filled me with anguish. I couldn't help glancing stealthily at Sebastián Miranda, and planning how I would escape the moment anyone tried to lay a hand on me. I don't know what would have happened if anyone had made a suspicious movement. The time went on. A patient came in who spoke German, and Miranda was chatting with him in that language;

the lunatic got excited, and so did Miranda, until it seemed to me that the real lunatic was my friend. Then another patient appeared who tried to persuade us that the asylum was a staff headquarters, and that he was a general who had just received the highest decoration that he could win. Somebody argued with him, and the "General" began to scream: "We're all lunatics here!" I wanted to scream back that I was not a lunatic at any rate. I was so far from being sure of it.

At last the doctor arrived and introduced his patient. Apparently he had started months before to go to bullrings to abuse me, until his fury would reach such a pitch that he would fall down in a fit and have to be carried out. Eventually he had come to have attacks at the mere mention of my name.

We talked together for quite a while, and it seemed to me that he had been well cured.

When they told him who I was he showed no excitement. Instead, he seemed rather ashamed and disconcerted.

"I didn't know what you were like," he said apologetically. "If I'd met you before I shouldn't have hated you so much. I did hate you terribly," he added, with tears in his eyes.

None of this did me any good. I didn't know what to do or say to him. I breathed comfortably again for the first time when at last I found myself out in the street.

This state of mind was absolutely incompatible with my profession. A man who is perturbed and unsure of himself is in no condition to kill bulls. I killed them with a desperate effort of will, and thanks to nothing but the mechanical skill which I had been acquiring. There was nothing else to do. I was simply a bad bullfighter. I didn't make any terrible exhibitions of myself; but I went out into the arena without confidence or enthusiasm,

ready to knock down meat like a butcher, to fight as little as possible and with the least possible risk.

The generosity of the Belmontists may not have admitted it; but I knew it. I am convinced that the art of bullfighting is first and foremost the deification of a state of mind; and moreover that only when the torero is deeply moved, only when he goes into the arena with a lump in his throat, is he able to infuse the public with the same emotion. Therefore I cannot say that at this time I was a good torero, even though I got through my corridas without causing any grave disorder. My reading had separated me too much from the essential objective of my life, and lost me in a maze of ridiculous preoccupations. Once, from Sevilla, I rang up a friend in Madrid to hold a long discussion with him about a phrase of D'Annunzio's which I had just read: "Danger is the pivot of the sublime life." Obviously it was impossible for a man who was endlessly dissipating his energy like that to fight well.

I began the season of 1916 in the same mood. I was mediocre in Barcelona; and afterwards, in the corrida of Resurrection Day in Sevilla, I was no less perfunctory. I fought in the first two corridas of the Feria without ambition, and only had one brief flare-up in the fourth, when I fought a bull of Gamero Civico named Vencedor. In the faena I recovered my mastery and felt again that intimate emotion which the torero transmits to the public, as if an electric current flowed between them. Once again, during that afternoon, I felt the thrill of the spectators trembling over me at every pass. After playing it with the muleta as much as I wanted, I knelt down in front of the horns of the bull and remained there for a time looking up serenely at the stands, which a little while ago had been booing me with good reason. They awarded me the ear of Vencedor, and there was even one

spectator who threw himself into the ring in an excess of jubilation to embrace and kiss me.

During that season I fought thirty-something corridas with Joselito. On the 30th of May, in Aranjuez, I was wounded in the chest and lost seven fights. I took part in the farewell to Regaterín in Madrid on the 27th of June; and on the 16th of July, when I was fighting in La Linea with Freg and Joselito, I was gored in the thigh by a Salas bull. I was going to make a *quite* when the horse reared against me and threw me on to the bull. At first I thought the injury was unimportant; but when I turned out again on the 13th of August in San Sebastián the wound was still troubling me, and I was out of action for the remainder of the season.

For some months I was unable to walk, and it was generally assumed that I should be lame for life. In 1916 I only took part in fortyfour corridas and killed ninetythree bulls.

The wound was healed by the following year and I returned to the arena, but with no more enthusiasm than I had felt the previous season. However much I tried to press my will beforehand, when I appeared in the ring I was apathetic, indolent, and cold. In this mood I fought thirteen corridas, in none of which I did anything worth seeing. I had no disastrous failures, but it was only very rarely and quite by accident that I made a good pass. My friends began to get annoyed with me. Some of them came to my house to tell me so.

"Don't make a fool of yourself," they said. "You can't go on like this. Either you make up your mind to fight or you'll have to give it up altogether."

I listened to them contritely; but in spite of all my resolutions I couldn't shake off my discouragement. The good intentions of

my friends were as much of a handicap as anything. Medina Vera made some caricatures of me in which he referred to my failures and demanded that I must triumph again the next time I fought in Madrid. I promised to do well, but my friends didn't trust me. They made me sign one of Medina Vera's caricatures for each one of them in confirmation of my promise. On the day of the corrida I saw them all in the stands, waving their signed drawings like bailiffs who had come to collect a debt from me. It gave them a scare, because they were still waving their promissory notes when at the first pass the bull caught me and threw me up to the clouds.

I knew only too well that this couldn't go on. The public wouldn't be slow to put me on the shelf if I couldn't shake myself out of my apathy. And then I had the inspiration that saved me.

I had to find myself again, and the only way to do that was to go back and begin afresh. I went to Triana, sought out my old friends of the San Jacinto gang, and reminded them of our old adventures in the pastures and enclosures. One night we went out again to Tablada, separated a bull, and fought it as we had done in the old days.

The result was amazing. The joy of bullfighting which I had lost in the bullrings returned to me, and again I felt the desire to triumph; and after a few trial corridas, in which I went on training myself and accustoming myself again to put my heart into the fight, I did indeed triumph indisputably on the 27th of April in Sevilla, when I was carried out by the crowd through the Prince's Gate.

I fought almost daily, and my enthusiasm and decision went on growing. When I came out in Madrid on the 21st of June to fight the Montepío charity corrida, I was in full form.

But the Madrid public had not forgotten my last performance. At the beginning of the corrida I was absolutely discredited. The public was tired of me. They thought I was finished.

I alternated with Gaona and Joselito, who won plenty of applause for their work with the first two bulls. The third, which was mine, was a big spiritless animal which I killed without difficulty and without glory. The other two, stimulated by their popularity, went on to greater heights than before. Gaona did a beautiful faena with the fourth bull, and with the fifth he rivalled Joselito in the *quites*. The applause became so hysterical that they were encouraged to go out and place the banderillas themselves. After many gay flourishes and audacities, they nailed four magnificent pairs which completed the enthusiasm of the public. When Joselito killed the bull with a splendid thrust at the end of one of his typical faenas, he brought the house down. Then I saw that they were not only applauding him but also Gaona, who came out with him to take a bow, while the crowd yelled itself hoarse with shouts of "The two alone! A corrida for the two alone!"

It was quite clear that I was not wanted; but in case there should be any doubt they also began to bawl: "Out with Belmonte! Send him away!"

I leaned against the barrera with my head bowed, hearing all of it, and thinking: "Am I nobody? Is it true that I'm a back number?"

It was quite obvious. The Madrid public had rejected me implacably. In these conditions, I opened my cape before the sixth bull.



Martin de Lévi

"I concluded with such a fortunate recorte that it left the
impression that the bull was a plastic mass."

I gave it two *verónicas*, which although the bull swerved away had the virtue of silencing the crowd and gripping their attention. Afterwards, in the first *quite*, I planted myself in front of the animal and very quietly, moving my arms very slowly, I gave it three more *verónicas* which were so smooth and gentle that while I was doing them I was aware of the thrilled silence of thirteen thousand people breathlessly following my every movement. I concluded with such a fortunate *recorte* that it left the impression that the bull was a plastic mass easily moulded into the fantastic arabesques shaped by my cape and my body. The public must have been somewhat disconcerted. Certainly they were not expecting that of me.

But it was still not so easy to triumph. When the bull attacked the horses for the second time, Rodolfo Gaona was there with his graceful cape, to drop on his knees and enrapture the spectators with such a close pass and such a lovely and courageous *recorte* that to some extent the impression left by my *verónicas* was overshadowed. After him, Joselito drew the bull towards him with his marvellous cape in another flowing and unhurried pass; and at the very moment when the bull crossed him, crowned the pass with a harmonious movement of his body which gave it an indescribable emotion. The crowd seethed with excitement.

It was then that I went towards the bull with more faith than I have ever approached one in my life. I wasted no time on tricks and bravados. I cited the bull according to the strict rules of the pure Ronda school of fighting; and bringing myself close to it with blind confidence, I gave it a *media verónica* which was perhaps the best I have ever done in my career. The multitude rose from their seats as if they had been raised by a spring, and before their astounded eyes I traced between the horns of the



Monte de Leno

*"Joselito drew the bull towards him with his marvellous cape
in another flowing and unburied pass."*

bull the most polished and exact *farol* which can be imagined. I was lucky. The greatest gamble of my life had been won.

Even then, Gaona threw his cape over his shoulder and brushed the bull in three *gaoneras* which were as brave and elegant and artistic as anyone could wish. But there was nothing in the world that could obliterate that last *media verónica* of mine.

Magritas came out with the banderillas, and nailed as superb a pair as can have been seen for many years. And in this new atmosphere I was able to take the muleta and approach the bull again with some hopes of winning back my prestige.

I knelt down and cited the bull. It was a pass which turned out to be impeccable. I went on playing it with *naturales*, without moving an inch from my position. The bull, held by the folds of the muleta, passed and repassed around my body with mathematical exactness, as if instead of being hurled on by the commands of its blind instinct it was moved by clockwork—or perhaps it would be more accurate to say by that “soft air of leisured whirls” of which Rubén speaks. After performing a sober faena in the classical Ronda tradition, and playing the bull smoothly and reposefully with my left hand, I changed the muleta to my right and mocked the bull with the gaiety of eye-filling *molinetes* and impudent gallantries. They say that it was the best faena which I have ever done. Perhaps it was. All I know is that in the crisis in which I found myself I had to do what I did then if I wanted to go on being a torero.

I have never seen an audience so thrilled as mine was that afternoon. Nor can their attitude towards a man ever have changed so radically in the short time which is taken up in fighting one bull. Perhaps this capacity for enthusiasm and for revising its judgments is the best quality of the bullfighting public. The *aficionados* were in delirium; and the Royal Family, breaking all precedents, went on

applauding from their box while the bull was being dragged out. They didn't award me the ear because the crowd was so stupefied by what it had seen that nobody could think of anything else but clapping his hands to his head and giving free rein to his emotion. A moment like that is worth all the bitterness of a torero's life. It may be because I see it like that that I have found the impertinence to tell the story myself with so little modesty.

5

The season of 1917, which had started so unpromisingly, was the one which afterwards came to be known to the *aficionados* as "Belmonte's year." I fought ninetyseven corridas and killed two hundred and six bulls. I had no serious accidents; and my enthusiasm for the fight went on growing from corrida to corrida until I reached the close of the season in the best of spirits and with all my faculties at their highest pitch. Apart from the corrida which I have just described, my most distinguished performances were at the Ferias of Bilbao and San Sebastián; my fights in the north during that year achieved heights of success which consolidated my prestige.

I bade farewell to Madrid in October in a corrida in which I alternated with Celita, in which he was unfortunate enough to receive a serious goring. It was due not so much to his inexperience as to his conscientiousness. After he had been carried out, I killed his bull with one of the best thrusts I have ever given, after a faena with the muleta which pleased the public so much that when I left the ring my carriage was surrounded by hundreds of cheering spectators.

I fought the last corrida of the season in Barcelona, also with great success, and decided to go to Lima.

I had originally thought of spending the winter with a travelling circus. I have already explained that at that time I was at the mercy of the craziest ideas, and this one fascinated me irresistibly. At this time one couldn't travel in Europe on account of the war; and since I had bought a marvellous trunk in Bayona, the first wardrobe trunk I had ever seen, I couldn't bear the thought of vegetating in Madrid for the winter.

It was then that I met an impresario of the Lima bullring who wanted to take me to fight in Peru, where he told me that there were some genuine Indians with feathers and everything, so picturesque and extraordinary that the mere prospect of seeing them was enough to make me forget my idea of joining the circus. The desire to christen my trunk on a long journey and get to close quarters with these Indians whom I had dreamed of from my boyhood induced me to sign his contract and set off.

6

This impresario was a weird personage. He was a little man with a very large head and the crisp kinky hair of a mulatto. He was always very dapper, and wore on his finger a huge diamond which was the sensation of bullfighting parties in Madrid. He considered his feet so small and delicate that they were only comfortable in women's shoes, and he used heavily perfumed little feminine handkerchiefs which he thought were extremely refined. He used to sit outside a café in the Calle de Alcalá having his shoes shined, and when he was in a good mood he would pay the boot-

black with a little golden coin. These little golden coins which he distributed so liberally soon gave him the reputation of being a millionaire among the bullfighting fraternity. His only luggage was his handful of golden coins and two bottles of exotic perfume which he carried in his pockets when travelling. He was madly in love with Amalia Isaura, who apparently didn't think so highly of him; and he used to boast that he was ready to spend all the gold in the world to win her.

Heralded by the legend of his golden coins and his other extravagances, he fell into our circle; and he was clever enough to realise that it would not be difficult to tempt me to go with him. While he was telling me his wonderful tales about the country and its marvellous Indians, he was busily winning the goodwill of my companions and hypnotising them with his fabulous riches. He played poker with us, at which he invariably lost, lent money to the banderilleros, scattered his golden coins among the florists, and generally succeeded in dazzling us until anyone would have been ready to go to Lima with him. Eventually he collected a troupe of about fourteen toreros, and we all embarked for Peru at his expense. The matadors were Fortuna and myself, with our respective cuadrillas.

Although it is true that before we left he hadn't given us a penny or offered us any serious guarantees, we didn't think we needed any further evidence of his solvency. He paid all our passages to Cuba; and everything went well until we reached Havana, where we disembarked and apparently settled down for ever. He had no more money to go on. It seems that all his wealth consisted of the golden coins which he had distributed so generously among the bootblacks and florists of Madrid, the huge diamond on his finger, and the two bottles of scent. He had nothing else.

The few coins that he had left were quickly taken off him by the dozens of negro porters who carried our voluminous luggage through the various customs offices of the port; and he was left with his troupe of toreros to feed and look after. He was hoping that his partner in Lima would send him some money to continue the journey; but whether on account of the upheaval caused by the war, or for some other less extraordinary reason, it certainly didn't arrive.

However, he was a man of great resourcefulness; and after a few hours of uncertainty he told us that we should leave immediately for Panama on a Spanish boat which was anchored in the port. I don't know exactly how he arranged it, but I noticed that the solitaire which had been so universally admired in Madrid no longer glittered on his hand.

The ancient Spanish boat which took us to Panama was commanded with great pomp and ceremony by a captain who dressed the part so well that he might have been a typical old salt in a comic opera. He received us with a ferocious glare, and took pains to tell us that he had no use for bullfighters and had never seen a bullfight. The way the ship was run justified these warnings, because the captain treated the passengers and crew as if he were their uncle. In the beginning he was infuriated by the noise which we made on board; but in the end we won him over, and by the third day out he was inviting us to his cabin for drinks and sitting up with us all night to tell stories of the sea and his past voyages.

One day our uncle the captain wanted to be photographed on the bridge surrounded by his fifteen toreros. One of the officers acted as photographer; but as the sun was behind us, the ship had to be turned round before we could be photographed as the captain wanted. For half an hour we were wandering about the high seas

with the captain shouting contradictory orders to the helmsman until he finally got the sun into the position where the photographer wanted it; while the frightened passengers, bewildered by these inexplicable manœuvres, gathered on the decks and watched the captain proudly posing in the middle of his flock of bullfighters.

When we got to Panama there was great excitement. Almost as soon as the port authorities had withdrawn, two or three more launches full of armed marines rushed out and mounted guard over our old tub as if it had been a pirate ship. Eventually we discovered what was happening. A German had travelled with us. A real German! In our excited imaginations the incident assumed gigantic proportions. Who could it be? What terrible spy had been on board with us, and what earth-shaking secrets had he unveiled? Presently I saw him brought out and marched away between two platoons of marines—a poor little fellow, slightly lame, shabbily dressed, and hollow-cheeked with hunger, who carried all his possessions tied up in a handkerchief. A council of war was held in Panama against our captain for having carried such a dangerous character; the ship was detained for seven days in the port; and when at last we were allowed to go, the Peruvian ship which was to have taken us on to El Callao had departed.

The worst of it was that our impresario, having no money, could only take us on that particular ship, which had been willing to give him our passages on credit.

We took the train across to the Pacific side of the Canal in the hope of finding some other boat which would take us to Peru on the promises of our impresario. On the way I met an amusing and attractive girl whom I couldn't quite place: she looked half English and half Indian. We were travelling in the same compartment, and when she noticed that I kept looking at her—I still hadn't lost the

habit of looking at women with that impertinent stare which is the custom of my country—she became embarrassed, turned her back, looked at me again; and eventually we got into conversation.

Without any warning she said: "Why don't you come to my house this evening?"

"It's very good of you," I said. "I'd love to come, but I'm afraid it's impossible."

"Why won't you come?" she insisted puzzledly.

"Because I've got to go straight to the port and get on a boat."

She made a little grimace of disgust and drew back sulkily.

"You know, I'd pay you whatever you wanted," she said.

I wasn't expecting that, and it made me laugh idiotically. She was so surprised and shocked that it only made me laugh more helplessly. It was the first business proposition I had ever received, and I'm sorry now that I didn't take the opportunity.

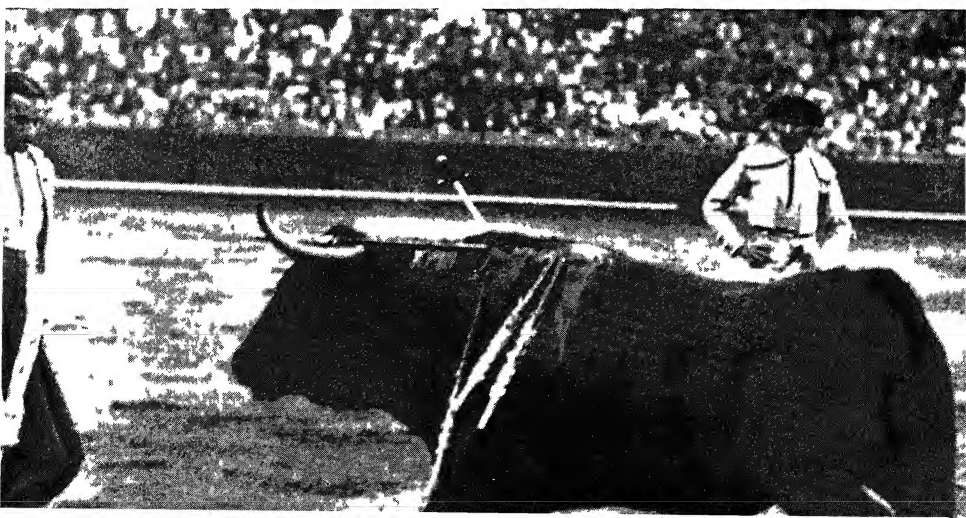
In the port, our impresario found a ship which was going to Guayaquil to load sugar. Her captain, on the strength of very little money and a great many promises, agreed to change his course in order to drop us at El Callao. We embarked that same evening. When we reached the customs to clear our luggage, the American customs official had just finished his day's work and was going home. We persuaded him to wait and pass our luggage; and he agreed to do this, probably thinking that it would only consist of three or four handbags. When he discovered that it contained all the equipment of fifteen bullfighters he became angrier and angrier. The thing that amazed him most was a trunk full of books which I always took with me—he couldn't understand why it was necessary to have a library with you in order to fight bulls. Besides this, my *mozo de espadas*, who has always fancied himself as a business man although he has never made a single deal in his life,

"Profiling," poised for the *estocada*. (In this picture Belmonte is fighting for charity, without pay, and therefore he does not wear the *traje de luces*.)





Belmonte goes in to kill with a *volapié*, and the bull founders and goes down while he holds up his hand to order his cuadrilla not to interfere, knowing that the bull will be dead before its knees buckle.



had several cases of samples of sherry, with which he hoped to make a fortune as an agent for the wine in Peru. While the customs man was examining all this junk, Fortuna had got into a fight with some negro boys who were hanging around the shed. The tin roof of the building clanged like gunfire under the impacts of the stones and bananas with which Fortuna and the negro boys were bombarding each other. This brought the indignation of the customs man to a climax. He kicked us out with our luggage in a magnificent temper.

"Bullfighters!" he was muttering incredulously. "Spanish bullfighters! My God!"

We must have left him with the most curious idea of Spain and the Spanish people.

Our new boat gave us an even more picturesque and unconventional voyage than the last. Since it wasn't equipped to carry passengers, there was no chef and no other meals than the ordinary rations of the crew. We therefore took over the kitchen, and each of us cooked whatever he liked. Those who had the most experience cooked for the others. The crew took a fancy to these various local dishes, and in the end we had to cook for them as well. One day they came across Antonio's cases of sherry. They drank several of them with disastrous results. Tight as drums, they immediately lost all respect for discipline, and when the officers tried to bring them to order they mutinied and seized the ship. The captain and the other officers took refuge on the bridge and prudently decided to wait until they sobered up. All night the ship wandered about the sea wherever it pleased. The drunken sailors and the drunken bullfighters finally began to fight; and half seriously and half from sheer good spirits they began to throw everything they could lay their hands on at each other. One banderillero got hold of a fire ex-

tinguisher and squirted it at the head of a sailor who was annoying him. A dense fog filled the boat and threatened to asphyxiate us. I have never known such a crazy voyage, and I still don't know how we got to El Callao.

7

Lima was like Sevilla. I was amazed to have travelled so far in order to find myself in my own home. Sometimes in the street I would meet characters that seemed so familiar and faces that I seemed to know so well that it was hard for me not to greet them like old friends. As yet the American influence was very weak, and Lima was still more than anything an Andalusian town, full of colonial associations and Spanish survivals. The bullring had been built two centuries before by a Spanish viceroy to collect funds to maintain the almshouses, and its atmosphere was strongly colonial. The houses were Spanish, or rather Andalusian, never more than two storeys in height, with barred windows and patios full of flowers; and the world in which we moved was just as Spanish as the buildings.

Lima gave us the friendliest welcome. Wherever we went, we were honoured and feasted with typical Andalusian kindness and liberality, so that it was almost impossible for us to spend a penny.

In Lima we found good *aficionados*. Bullfighting there dates back to the time of the Spanish conquerors; and it has an intelligent and enthusiastic public which appreciated that we were there to fight seriously, and not just to charge the highest prices we could get for exhibitions without risk or artistry. Not long before then, Rodolfo Gaona had spent a most brilliant season in Lima, and the interest in

bullfighting was at the height of its revival. The bullring had various boxes like those of the old Spanish theatres, a sort of enclosed balcony with the opening just above the top of the barrera at the height of the bullfighters' heads, so that in the intervals of the fight the toreros could chat with the spectators in the boxes—an arrangement which led to a very close and cordial sympathy between the bullfighters and the public. Bullfighting was in fashion; and in these boxes one would always find the smartest women and the girls of the best families in Lima.

We had been waiting interestedly to meet the partner of our fantastic impresario, and he turned out to be no less extraordinary than one would have expected. He was an Italian, an ice-cream man by origin, a sordid and miserly creature who was generally believed to be connected with money-lending, a gloomy and shabby character in surprising contrast to his spectacular colleague. They were complete opposites and were always quarrelling furiously, but in business they made an excellent combination. After meeting his partner I could understand the anxious economies of our impresario during the eventful journey.

In Lima they called the Italian Machacuita—a name which he owed to a famous swindle of his picturesque associate. On a certain occasion the Italian had provided his partner with money to go to Spain and make a contract with Machaquito, who was then at the peak of his career. It so happened that while the impresario was still in Madrid, Machaquito, with whom he had in fact made a verbal agreement, cut his pigtail overnight; and since our friend didn't dare to come back without Machaquito after having spent a good deal of money on the negotiations, he had the idea of engaging a young bullfighter who called himself Machaquito de Sevilla and presenting him to his partner as the original article. The Italian

discovered the fraud before his partner returned to Spain, and howled his wrath to the heavens. Everyone he met had to listen to his tale of woe about the two Machacuitas, which was how he pronounced it, and he told the story so often and was so noisily sorry for himself that Machacuita remained his nickname for ever after.

Their other business relations were just as incredible. Neither of them trusted the other, and they were always on guard to see which was going to swindle which. The Italian kept the lion's share of the profits, and the Peruvian had no scruples about the tricks he used to neutralise the avarice of his capitalist partner. He contracted toreros at one price and quoted another to his partner; on bull-fighting days he stood at one of the entrances of the Plaza and let anybody in without a ticket who gave him half the price of admission in cash; he sold the refreshments concession to seven different people, and invented a hundred and one other ingenious devices to take money out of the hermetically sealed purse of the Italian.

It was tit for tat. I have never met any impresarios like them in my career.

Nevertheless that season in Lima was one of my best bull-fighting campaigns. Every afternoon I went out to fight with extraordinary enthusiasm. I believe that the emotion of which I have spoken already, and which I hold is indispensable to the art of bull-fighting, has as indefinable an origin as the emotion of love. More than that, I have observed so many identical parallels between the two that if I were an essayist instead of a bullfighter I should venture to put forward a sexual theory of the art. One fights bulls and thrills the spectators in the same way that one loves and falls in love, by virtue of an impulse of spiritual energy which as I under-

stand it springs fundamentally from the same source. When this hidden source runs dry, it is useless to try and force oneself. Will-power will achieve nothing. One cannot fight bulls at will any more than one can fall in love.

In Lima I passed through one of the most exuberant periods of my life. I fought in nine corridas, alternating in nearly all of them with Fortuna, Chiquito de Begonia, and Alcalareño. All of them were triumphs. A critic in Lima wrote that I went out to fight as if I had been setting out to conquer a woman. And in fact I did conquer one. She is my wife.

8

Would you like to know how I won my wife? I found out about it myself recently from a story in an American magazine. Here it is:

I went out that afternoon to make the parade into the ring, wearing my cloak of embroidered silk and carrying in my hand a large bunch of roses. To the tune of a *pasodoble* I crossed the arena at the head of my cuadrilla as if I were an opera singer coming out for a song; and after ceremoniously saluting the President I went straight to a box where She was sitting. The American journalist describes her beauty in flowery phrases which are sincerely flattering. He also describes the wave of curiosity which swept over the thousands of spectators as they saw me advance towards this beautiful woman, still with my bunch of roses in my hand. She blushed as I offered her the roses with a magnificent gesture: and picking out one of them, the reddest of them all, she offered it back to me with no less grace. I put it in my buttonhole; and filled with sudden courage, wearing the rose as if it had been the most precious

of decorations, I went towards the bull, which during all these courtesies and salaams had been roaring ferociously as it waited for me. Dripping foam from its mouth and lightning from its eyes, the terrible bull hurled itself towards me. I advanced my breast, and the animal's damp muzzle brushed the rose which She had given back to me. It seems that this simple accident annoyed me exceedingly; and being annoyed myself, I set out to annoy the bull by passing the rose under its snout at every pass. At this point the American chronicler describes the shattering emotion of the multitude. And then a remarkable thing happened, something between conjuring and juggling. The bull, with the neatest flick of its horns that can be imagined, picked the red rose cleanly out of my buttonhole and bore it away speared on one horn-tip. Seeing this miracle, my wife swooned away, saying: "This is terrible! How can I resist him?"

This is a very pretty story, but until I read it my own impression had been that the truth was much more simple.

I saw my wife for the first time at a bullfight; we were introduced afterwards at a party; we flirted a little at the theatre; and once we even spoke to each other on the telephone. It was all perfectly ordinary and devoid of any novelettish trimmings. And yet one day it did unexpectedly take on a deeper meaning.

Even then, nothing exciting happened. But one morning I went out into the street, and I was standing on the pavement when I saw her. She was coming towards me, smiling.

*Yo la vi y ella me miró;
En la mano llevaba una flor . . .*

At that instant I had a strange sensation of completeness, of security and satisfaction. There was no hesitation or doubt. This

woman was my woman. It seemed to me that until then I had been wandering about the world in search of something, and at that moment I had found it.

It isn't easy for me to express the feeling. Some people can talk about their falling in love with lyrical emphasis and eloquent descriptions. All I can say is that like the blind man who opens his eyes to the light, or the unbeliever overtaken on the Damascus road, I was filled with a supreme sensation of peace and contentment when I discovered that this woman was meant for me. Afterwards she told me that she had the same feeling.

"I remember that when I passed you that morning I had an impulse to throw you the rose I was carrying. But I didn't dare. It would have been so brazen."

So there really was a rose in it after all.

Since I was in love, I hardly noticed the passing of the time; and between the delights of courtship and the triumphs of my corridas the days went by without my thinking for a moment about the necessity of returning to Spain. The season ended, and my cuadrilla began to feel a certain anxiety about the return. To me the idea of going away seemed quite absurd, and I became angry every time that I was reminded of it. I didn't see why we shouldn't stay in Lima for ever. Spain was very far away, almost in the Antipodes. My banderilleros didn't agree with this; for them, the Antipodes were still Lima. But since I had fallen in love in Lima, I considered Lima my real centre, and thought of the people of Triana as the remote inhabitants of some Ruritanian country without any reality. When the boys of my cuadrilla heard me talking like that, they took to gathering in corners and whispering to each other that I was getting a screw loose.

But the season in Lima was definitely over; and I was contracted

for various corridas in Venezuela for which I would have to leave very soon. Under the threat of this inevitable departure, the urgent need to do something about my infatuation became more pressing. I thought of abducting my sweetheart and abandoning everything to fly with her. An elopement like that, with me galloping away with my sweetheart on my saddle-bow, would have suited the American journalist down to the ground; but unfortunately in Lima I had no horse. So I had to get married, which seemed a fairly practical solution.

All the same, the idea of the ceremony horrified me. The more I thought about it, the harder it was for me to accept the idea of dressing up in my best clothes and standing in front of a priest. I have always had an instinctive dislike for ceremonies—whether they are weddings or baptisms or funerals or receptions. At funerals I'm always seized with an insane desire to laugh which I don't know how to suppress.

Then I discovered that while I was fighting in Venezuela someone else could get married for me, which pleased me immensely. So I was married by proxy, and succeeded in escaping the hated ceremony. I wasn't present at my wedding, I haven't attended the baptisms of my daughters, I haven't gone to any of the functions to which I have been invited, and I suspect that I shan't even be at my own funeral.

To get to Venezuela, we had to pass through Panama; and it occurred to our impresario to organise a corrida there for Chiquito de Begofia and myself. In Panama the bullfights are always without

picadors, and we thought it would be a great novelty to introduce the natives to this part of the fight. Since we had our picadors with us, the only difficulty was to find horses.

The caretaker of the bullring in Panama was an old Cordoban of the classic stamp, a grave and sententious man who had been in Panama for twenty years.

"What have you been doing all that time?" we inquired when we met him.

He shook his head slowly and replied:

"I have spent twenty years teaching travellers who come from Spain how not to be cheated here." He paused, spat, and added: "And in the end, they've all cheated me."

His serene resignation to the ingratitude of humanity was enough to identify him as a true countryman of Seneca.

So as not to spoil his record, we cheated him ourselves. Since we were unable to find horses to use in the corrida, we asked him to lend us two mares which he kept for milk, a side line which helped him to eke out the inadequate salary which he drew from the bullring. At first he refused, on account of the great affection which he had for his old nags; but we convinced him that nothing would happen to them. Our picadors were very expert at their jobs, we would put extra large points on the lances; and since on top of that the local bulls were only half-blooded stock he could be sure that his horses would come out unharmed. He let himself be talked round, and handed his mares over to our picadors with instructions to defend their lives at any cost. One of them was called Pabilo, and the Cordoban loved it like his own child.

But since in a bullfight nothing can be foreseen, as soon as the first bull came out into the arena and before we could realise the tragedy, his two horses had been ripped open. One of them,

Pabilo herself, spurred by the wound, bolted madly away; somehow or other it got out of the arena and out of the bullring, and galloped wildly through the streets. It was a pathetic and unpleasant episode. The poor Cordoban rolled on the ground and beat his breast in despair, weeping for the death of his beloved Pabilo. He wanted to kill us. He spent the whole night moaning: "Oh, my poor Pabilo!"

IO

We went on to Venezuela. After so many months of wandering about the earth, the others had lost the impetus of the early days and were falling victims to homesickness. My cuadrilla spent their time gazing at the sea and thinking about Sevilla.

"What time is it?" one of them would ask.

"By the cathedral, it's five minutes to seven," another would answer.

"Ten past seven, by the Plaza Nueva," would come from a third.

Because they insisted on regulating their watches by Sevilla time, which according to them was the only correct one.

"Seven o'clock! Now you could get fried fish at home."

"The people are coming out of the olive works and the cork factories. Soon the Alameda will be full of girls."

"And what girls they are!"

"Oh, my Triana!"

"Oh, my Sevilla!"

And they would almost burst into tears.

I stayed in my cabin and dreamed happily. About that time my

wedding would be taking place in Lima, and soon I should be going back to Panama where I had arranged to meet my wife.

One night I was so carried away by the desire to express my feelings that I left my cabin and went to the writing-room, where I sat down to indite a long, long letter to my love. Antonio came to look for me in my cabin, and was surprised not to find me there. He went on to search the whole ship, and when he didn't find me he raised the alarm. My recent behaviour must have seemed strange enough to my friends, for I had told them nothing about my engagement or my intended marriage; so when they heard that I had disappeared they recalled my incomprehensible moods and could only decide that I must have thrown myself overboard. The whole ship was roused, and they even wanted to turn it round and go back to look for me. When they finally discovered me in the writing-room, surrounded by mountains of notepaper covered with my writing, they were convinced that I must be insane. One of them even wanted to have me locked up for my own safety.

In Venezuela we disembarked at Puerto Cabello, where two cars had been sent by one of the sons of the President, General Gómez, to take us straight to his estate at Maracay.

On the estate we were received by his other sons. They were big strong fellows, devoted to bullfighting and their work on the ranches; and they had prepared an original welcome for us. When we entered the estate we saw one of them mounted on a magnificent horse galloping after a young bull. When he caught up with it he seized it deftly by the tail, and threw it into the air with a dexterous twist of surprising strength. We were properly dazzled.

It was an immense place. Thousands of head of cattle roamed on the unlimited pastures, where the General reared them to be sold to American canners. Every day dozens of them had to be rounded

up for export, and the work of selecting them and driving them into the corrals gave us endless opportunities to practise fighting them. The General was much more devoted to his ranch than to the duties of government, and lived there nearly all the year round like any Andalusian farmer. His sons were just the same; and every day we rode out together to take part in the work. Twenty or thirty of us would ride out in the morning into the wild and splendid country to move the herds. We fought as many of them as would charge; and in the evening we would ride back to the village, worn out but happy, with our eyes aching from scanning the vast distances and the blood boiling in our veins. Resting under the shade of the palms after these gallops, while the dice rattled in the cup and money passed from hand to hand, and jests and comments flashed back and forth like whip-cracks, I felt that I was enjoying the most healthy and intense and virile life that one could find anywhere in the world.

Juan Vicente Gómez, rich landowner, General, and President of the Republic of Venezuela, soon took a great liking to me. As a lover of the country and his farm, he was delighted to see me entering so enthusiastically into the life. He hardly ever visited the capital; and I myself only went there on Saturdays, to fight on Sunday and return at once to the estate with the General and his sons. On the ranch there was no etiquette. The General went about like any ordinary peasant on his smallholding. Sometimes ministers and other exalted functionaries would come from Caracas to confer with him, and they would find him busily working like any ordinary labourer. In spite of his terrible reputation, he seemed to me to be just a simple landed gentleman with no interests outside his ranch. His amusements were of the same calibre. He had just received from America a barber's chair full of nickel-plated gadgets, and he



Martín de León

"Every day we rode out together to take part in the work."

played with it like a child with a new toy. He became so fond of me that he wanted to give me some land in Venezuela so that I could settle down there for the rest of my life. I didn't accept—and since then one of the greatest deposits of petroleum in the country has been discovered under the land he wanted to give me.

Recently I had a letter from him in which he begged me to go back. I was told that a bullring had been built in Maracay, and he wanted to see me fight again before he died. I shall have to go.*

But at that time I was anxious to go to Panama and meet my wife. The Germans had been torpedoing American ships, and the arrivals and departures of vessels were being kept secret, so that several days went by without my being able to arrange my sailing. When the General's sons heard about it, they said: "Don't worry about that. We'll get father to send you off in a battleship."

The General did in fact offer to place a warship at my disposal to take me to Panama; but this seemed far too overwhelming, and I declined. I went to La Guaira and embarked on the first boat I could find: it was a Spanish ship that was going to Panama by way of Puerto Rico and Cuba.

In Puerto Rico there were the same grotesquely elaborate precautions against spies. First we were shut up for the night in a warehouse beside the port, presumably to ripen. Then some very obvious detectives arrived and cross-examined us with great cunning in an attempt to drag out of us I don't know how many fearful secrets of the war. They inspected our luggage minutely, examined my case of books page by page, and even studied the

* Belmonte was on his way to Venezuela in 1936 to keep this promise when General Gómez died.

leaves of a book of cigarette papers which they found on me. They stripped us and sponged us over with some chemical to find out if we had any messages written on our skin. I don't believe that even the staff headquarters of the Allies can have been guarded so zealously as these coffee-coloured detectives looked after their precious island.

In Cuba bullfighting is prohibited; and although there are thousands of Spaniards who are eager to see it, the government submits to the agitation of the Society for the Prevention of Cruelty to Animals and ruthlessly prosecutes any attempts to infringe the law. Near Havana there is a small bullring which is used to keep cattle that are being taken to the slaughter-house, and occasionally *aficionados* have tried to hold secret fights there with the best animals they could get. But in Havana there was also an old lady who was the president of the local branch of the S.P.C.A., and who was everlastingly on the watch to save the Island of Cuba from seeing the barbarous spectacle of a bullfight.

This woman pursued me mercilessly. As soon as she learnt of my arrival in Cuba she went on the warpath, and her spies never left my heels in their efforts to frustrate the desire of the Cuban *aficionados* to see me fight.

But another person who knew of my stay in Cuba was a Spaniard from the Asturias who was a fervent admirer of bullfighting and was crazy to see me in action. He was a well-known chemist who had spent many years in Havana, where he had achieved a highly distinguished social position. As soon as he met me he suggested that we should go to the bullring the next morning, where he had everything arranged, and let out some of the bulls to see if they would charge. He had prepared an elaborate organisation to evade the old woman's sleuths, who would have promptly denounced us

to the authorities if they had heard of our intention. I don't believe he slept a wink that night in his excitement.

When I was preparing to go to the bullring the next morning, another difficulty arose. The ship was to sail early in the afternoon, the bullring was a long way off, and there was a risk that I might be left behind. The chemist solved this problem as well by persuading the captain of the ship, who was damned if he had any interest in bullfighting, to come with us. We put him in a carriage and set off. To avoid any delay, the Asturian had sent his wife and daughter to the bullring early in the morning to get the arena into the best condition they could manage. I fought as well as I could with the animals at our disposal; and the chemist joined in as well. I have never seen a man more beside himself with enthusiasm. He rolled on the ground, kissed the sand, and wept with joy.

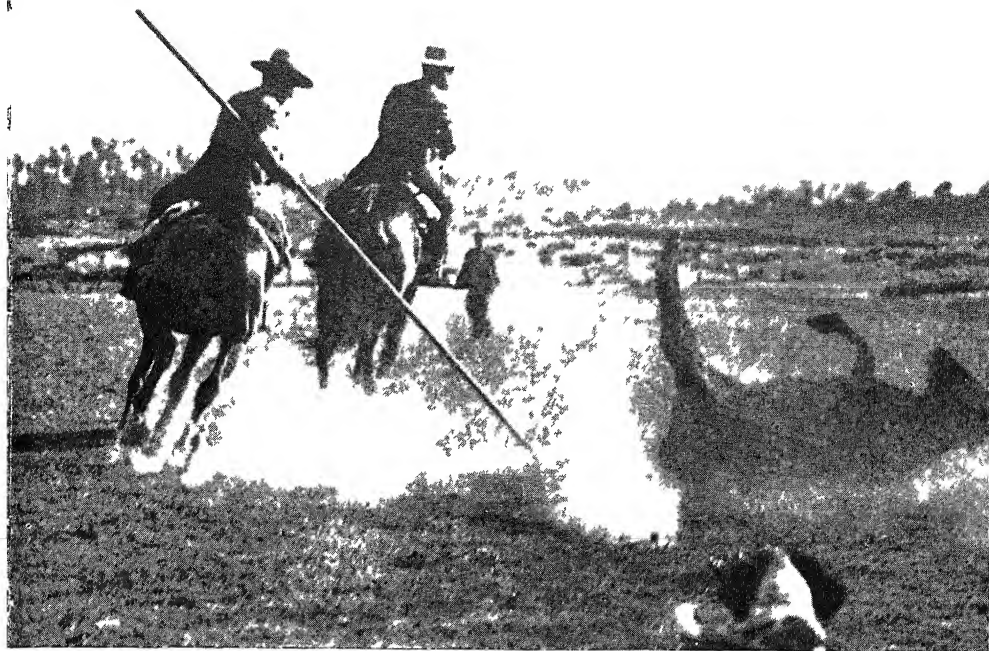
"I've seen Belmonte fight!" he was yelling all the way back. "Down with the S.P.C.A.! To hell with its old president! Viva Belmonte!"

We reached the port three hours after we were supposed to have sailed, and the captain was furious. But the chemist stayed to wave us goodbye, dancing up and down on the wharf like a lunatic and shouting: "I've seen Belmonte fight!"

At last I arrived in Panama where my wife was waiting for me. The other members of my cuadrilla had returned to Spain, and only Antonio had stayed with me. He was dismayed when I told him that he would have to stay there alone and wait for a ship to take him home.

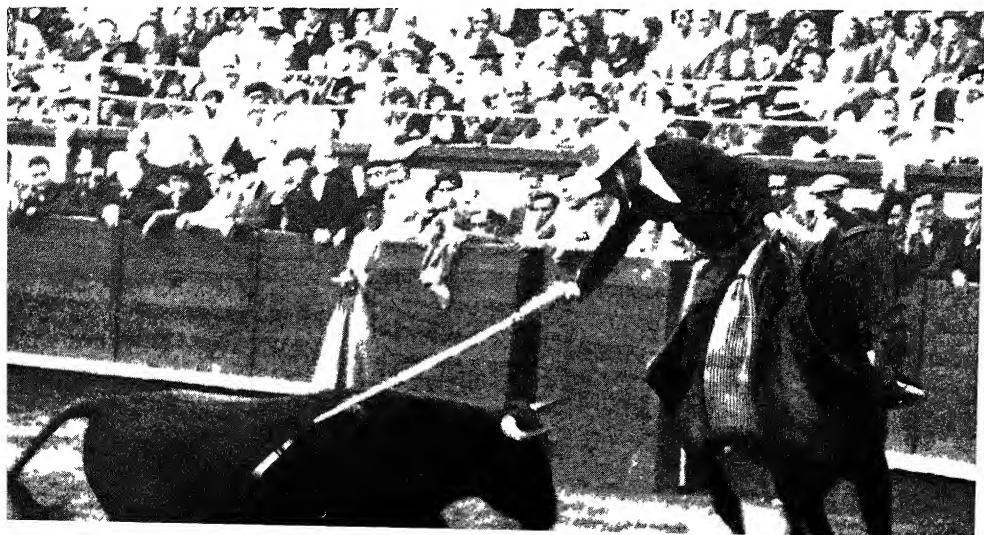
"Don't go, Juan," he pleaded brokenly. "Remember that I don't know how to get back. I'll die here before I find the way to Spain."

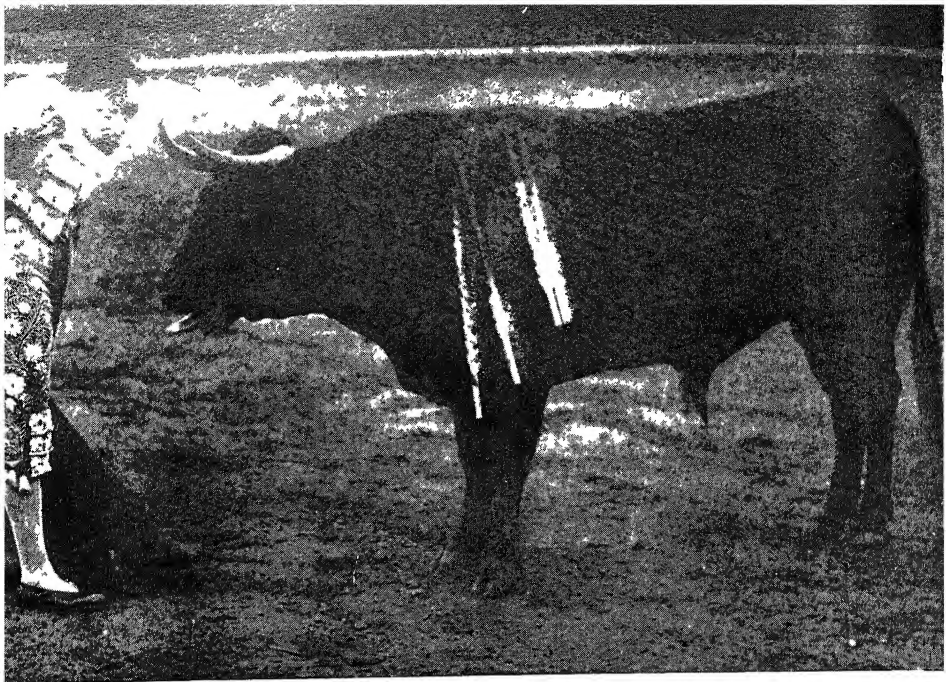
I remember that as we talked we were walking along an avenue in which there was a statue of Christopher Columbus; and when



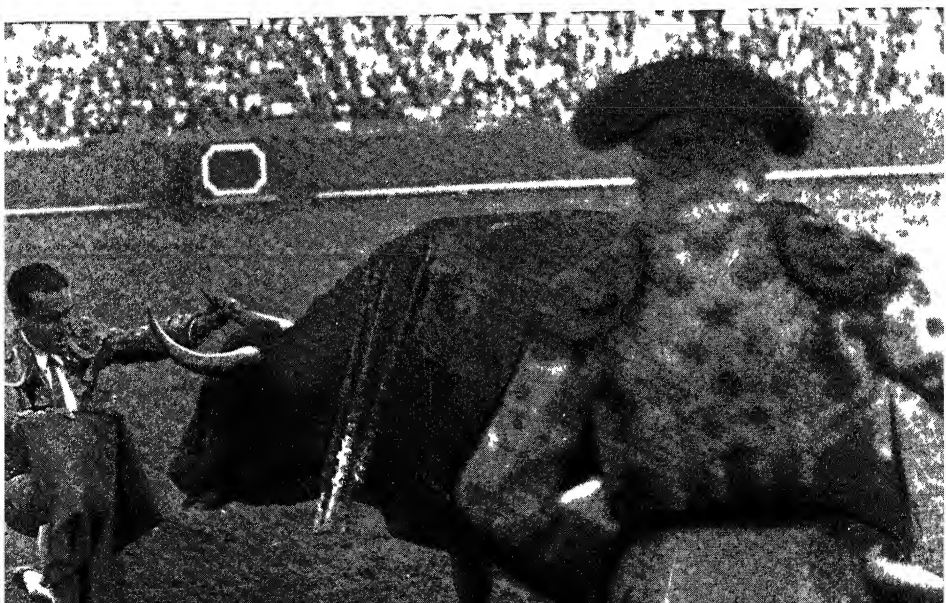
Belmonte's favourite sport—tilting at bulls in the open country.

Rejoneando—fighting from horseback, where the mount is as nimble and highly trained as a polo pony.





A *desplante* and an *adorno* by Belmonte, in his last season.



Antonio saw it he looked up at it and said: "Why did you have to discover America? Why couldn't you have stayed at home, damn you?"

His depression was tragic. He had made friends with the Spanish Consul, and one afternoon he went to see him.

"How much does it cost to embalm a body and send it back to Spain?" he asked very seriously.

The astonished Consul had to work it out and give him a figure. Antonio took out his wallet and counted out the money.

"Take it," he said. "Swear to me by all your ancestors, by the honour of your father and the soul of your mother, that if I die in Panama you'll have me embalmed and send me back to Spain. I don't want to be buried here."

The Consul didn't know what to reply. Then Antonio took out his gold watch and showed it to him.

"Swear to me that you will send this watch back to my mother. Don't let it run down. It's running on Sevilla time, the real time, the time in the Plaza Nueva."

Poor Antonio! The tears streamed down his face when we left. With his savings he had bought two diamonds in Lima, and he insisted on giving them to my wife as a wedding present.

"What do I want them for," he moaned, "if I shall never get out of here alive?"

When my wife and I were alone we went down to the port and asked where the next ship was going to. There were two sailing at the same time: one for China, and the other for the Argentine. We tossed up for it, and three weeks later we were in Buenos Aires.

I had no wish to offer the spectacle of a newly married bullfighter, and I hoped that in a big cosmopolitan city like Buenos Aires we should be able to pass unnoticed. But we were unlucky. Big and varied as the city was, we fell straight into the heart of the Spanish colony. I had only just arrived at the hotel and was walking across the hall when I met Gómez Carrillo.

"What are you doing here?" he asked.

"I'm on my honeymoon."

"I came here to get married, but I don't know if I shall. The girl doesn't seem so keen on the idea. Perhaps I'll give it up and leave tomorrow. We'll see."

And he sauntered off, with his languid and elegant air.

Gómez Carrillo told some comedians who were touring with María Guerrero's company, the comedians told the journalists, the newspapers published pictures and caricatures of me, the Spanish clubs and societies sent deputations of welcome, and in three or four days I was surrounded by as many friends and admirers as if I had been in Madrid. If my wife and I went to a restaurant to have dinner alone together and talk the sweet nonsense which all honeymoon couples talk, we would look up and find ourselves pinned by the stares of a dozen or more curious onlookers, and catch them nudging each other and whispering: "It's Juan Belmonte, the Spanish bullfighter."

We had to flee from Buenos Aires and go to New York, where nobody knew us and there were hardly any *aficionados*.

We returned to Spain in the autumn of 1918. My wedding and my absence had been a titbit of gossip among the *aficionados* for

several months. When I got married I didn't feel that I had to consult the opinions of the *aficionados*; and since I had told nobody about it, and had felt that no public explanations were necessary of an event which in spite of the duties of popularity I considered strictly private, so many fantastic legends had grown up about my marriage that they had exactly the opposite result of what I had hoped to achieve with my reticence. I had hoped for my wedding to pass unnoticed, and the result was that it had been the talk of Spain ever since. One newspaper published a cartoon which showed Hindenburg in a pensive attitude, asking himself: "Can it be true that Belmonte has got married?"

So as soon as we landed at Cádiz we were mobbed by a vast crowd who wanted to see what my wife was like. In Sevilla, although we tried to hide ourselves, and my wife did her best to escape any publicity, it was impossible to avoid the attentions of the crowd, and in Triana we were literally besieged. All the women of the quarter had to file past to satisfy their inquisitiveness and give their candid opinions of my wife. I can't hide, any more than they could, the disillusionment which most of them suffered. They didn't like her. The old women looked her up and down and went off mumbling: "That's a fine sardine he picked for himself."

Fifteen or twenty years ago, the Spanish taste still ran to large and handsome women who were perfectly represented by the waitresses of the cafés. The national idea of womanhood was the heavy-weight, and they thought it unreasonable for a popular torero like myself to go against it. Now, when all the women of Spain are more like her, it is difficult to understand the public scandal which was caused by my affront to the national canons of beauty by making this upstart foreigner my bride.

"Can't even bullfighters' wives be what they ought to be?" thought the old guard angrily.

We went to Madrid to live, but even there we suffered the same sort of thing. One afternoon I was walking with my wife through the Puerta del Sol; and as soon as we were discovered the crowd swarmed round us so that in a couple of minutes we were imprisoned by an impenetrable mass of humanity. The traffic was stopped, the police turned out to disperse the crowd, and my wife was so embarrassed she swore that she would never go out with me again.

Being married, I had to put my accounts in order for the first time. Until then, I had lived in happy disregard of such problems. When I had had no money, I had simply gone without food; as I began to have more, I had spent it freely; and since in those days I had more money than imagination, I had had no economic problems. At the end of every season, Antonio would triumphantly announce that in spite of what we had spent we still had some money left, and this curious fact amazed me and gave me the impression of being conscientiously managed. Indeed, Antonio's management was most scrupulous. When the season began, he would buy a cash book, and enter every detail in it from day to day, something like this:

17th	Received from Feria in Valencia . . .	Pts 30,000.00
	Paid to bootblack	.50
		<hr/>
		29,999.50

At the end of the year, I would ask Antonio how the accounts stood, and he would bring whatever money was left, together with his grimy account book. I would take the money and solemnly tear up his book without examining it, which filled Antonio with legitimate pride.

Nevertheless, a torero is surrounded by so many strange camp-followers, and is subject to the exigencies of such a complex clientèle, that his financial affairs are always in a hopeless tangle. At that time I had three managements—one in Madrid, my business manager, with his retinue of traders in bullfighting; another in Sevilla, composed of friends and relatives who were continually increasing; and Antonio, whom you might call my manager in the field.

The *mozo de espadas* is the commander-in-chief of the campaign, and he controls an army of veteran subordinates. Immediately after him comes another very important personage called "the assistant to the *mozo de espadas*," who in his turn is surrounded by his friends and a horde of auxiliaries, who don't travel with the cuadrilla but are acquired temporarily at every bullring. The last members of this chain of servants are almost unknown to the bull-fighter himself, and they are mostly irresponsible and insolvent. If, for instance, the matador wants to send a telegram to somebody, the *mozo de espadas* gives it with the money to his assistant, the assistant passes it on to "the man who looks after the capes," the man who looks after the capes gives it to an assistant of his own, and sooner or later there is somebody in this complicated series who tears up the message and keeps the money.

Besides this picturesque rabble who trail after him, the torero has to support the burden of a large clientèle—if one can still use the word "client" in the ancient Roman sense instead of in the way it is understood today. His duties towards this clientèle are almost infinite, ranging from the purely material and economic to the moral and spiritual. A combination of the two is one of his heaviest burdens: that of patronising weddings and baptisms. I don't know why a torero should have to be a kind of universal godfather, but

everyone thinks they are entitled to bring their children to him to be baptized or married. I have always held out against this with a firmness which is almost rude; and when I have found no other way out, it has always been my brother or one of the members of my cuadrilla who has represented me.

In one village where I used to go every year to fight in the corridas of the Feria, there was a "client" who to my misfortune was blessed with a son, whose godfather he insisted I should have to be. The first time he suggested it I did the best I could to discourage him.

"I can't baptize him," I said, "because I have a superstition that all the children I baptize die."

"I don't care about that," he replied with infanticidal resolution.

I went on refusing him obstinately, but he refused to baptize the child unless I was the godfather; and every year when I went to the village he would present himself at the inn, hand in hand with his unfortunate offspring who was growing up to be a hopeless heathen.

"I'm bringing him to you again," he would say imploringly, "to see if I can't soften your heart and persuade you to make him a Christian. It's a crime for you to let him go on like this."

One year he arrived at the inn with his child as usual, at the end of a corrida in which a bull had gored me in the face. I had received first-aid treatment at the bullring, and they had brought me back to the inn to wait for the next train to Madrid, where I could have the wound attended to by a specialist. There was some fear that I might lose an eye, and this prospect combined with the intense pain I was suffering put me into a fearful temper. When the father arrived, he was very concerned about my wound and said that he knew an infallible remedy for such cases. This was simply to put a piece of beef over the injured eye, and he had so much faith in it that

he decided to go to a butcher's at once to fetch me the material. Before he went he picked up the child and put it beside me on the bed where I was lying in agony. The door had hardly closed after him when the boy began to howl, and I didn't know what to do with him. Since I didn't murder that little brat, I don't suppose I ever shall murder one.

Another man I remember was a relative of my manager, Juan Manuel. The latter had brought him to Madrid to help him because his financial position was hopeless at home. Although he lived very comfortably in Madrid under the protection of my manager, who gave him board and lodging and nothing to do except look for good *aguardiente*, he couldn't acclimatise himself, and hated everything he saw. Since he had no work to do, he used to take a chair out of his room and sit on the landing, and every time a neighbour went up or down the stairs he would greet him with his best smile and try to get him into conversation. The neighbour, who was probably coming home from his office in a bad temper, would answer with a grunt or perhaps not answer at all; and the poor Sevillan was bewildered by the rudeness and the haughtiness of the people of Madrid. One day Juan Manuel and I were together when he came in.

"I've come to tell you that I'm going back to Sevilla tonight," he said.

"But what's the matter? Haven't you got everything you need? What else do you want?"

"I want a little sympathy," he shouted. "I can't go on living in this place. I'm going back to my Alameda, to the Sevilla I love, where people have hearts. This is like living among savages."

"But what's happened to you, man?"

"I can't live peacefully in a place where a man can die in the flat

upstairs and nobody downstairs knows about it. This morning I was sitting at the door of my room, waiting to say good morning to him when he came down, and instead of walking down he was brought down in a coffin. Are we men or animals? In Sevilla, when a neighbour dies, everybody knows about it, and they have a wake for him as God would like it, and they spend the night talking about him, and telling stories of him, and weeping for him, and being sorry; and if they can find a glass of *aguardiente* they drink it to his memory. That's as it should be, sir! But this business of being thrown away overnight like an old rag, I won't have it! I'm going to die in my own quarter, where there are neighbours who will come to my wake and weep for me. I'm not going to die like a dog, sir!"

12

In 1919 I spent some weeks training in the country, and began to fight at the beginning of February. I did more fighting that year than in any other. Although I missed twelve corridas for different reasons, I fought in a hundred and nine and killed two hundred and thirtyfour bulls.

I was at my peak. I had been gradually acquiring a professional skill and confidence of which I had not thought myself capable before. I fought with an assurance and mastery which had never been so consistent. I went out into the arena three or four times a week, I was constantly crossing Spain from end to end, and yet in spite of the enormous physical effort I was fresh and strong, every time more sure of myself and more completely master of my job. I only had two or three accidents of minor importance. It was my best and most profitable year.

And yet, secretly, it was the year of greatest suffering, of the most painful vacillations, and the greatest spiritual exhaustion. To explain this flagrant contradiction between what I seemed to be and what was really happening to me, I have to emphasise my conviction that bullfighting is fundamentally a spiritual exercise and not merely a sport. Physical strength is not enough. Coincident with the peak of my fame, I began to feel a deadly reluctance, a terrifying discouragement, and a secret boredom with what I was doing every day. When I was fighting, I felt that I was doing something definitely stupid and meaningless. It was tiresome, miserable, and monotonous. I faced bulls with the same distaste with which a bricklayer might have approached his building, or a clerk might have gone to his desk. I was beginning to lose my enthusiasm again.

As my professional mastery increased, my inward fervour diminished. This gave me unspeakable torture, because at the same time I had begun to acquire a feeling of responsibility and a sense of continuity, and I was deeply preoccupied with the prestige of my name and the duty of keeping it at the same height. I would be fighting in the best of faiths when I would suddenly realise that it was worth nothing. The faena would be interrupted, and I would mark the precise moment in which triumph slipped through my fingers, and yet I would be unable to make the spiritual effort which was needed to retain it.

The public knew nothing of this; they did not realise, as I did, that in the course of a faena the crucial moment had arisen and gone by without my being able to crystallise it into the instant of emotion which is never forgotten. They saw me fighting well, courageously, confidently, master of the bull and myself at every moment; and they applauded me enthusiastically in nearly all my corridas. But

that supreme instant, that transfiguration which I had experienced in the early days, I now only achieved very occasionally.

I think that this was the most critical moment of my career. The overflowing enthusiasm of my first years was being ousted by the necessity of fighting well, not from the lyrical impulse of the moment, but from a sharp sense of accepted responsibility and the demands of reputation. The lump in the throat which I had felt before when I approached a bull was now replaced by a sober and worrying conception of duty; and to triumph in these conditions was more painful and difficult. I can say that on many occasions, in the midst of the loudest ovations, I was assailed by an unconquerable sadness and despair. It is so much easier to be a hero for an hour than to carry out a duty which has been laid on you for the length of your life.

To conquer these secret doubts, and to maintain through the years a line of conduct and a sense of continuity in the art, is one of my greatest prides.

But the public is unable to appreciate this difficult achievement of continuity in the same way that it appreciates the ups and downs of a heroic struggle. The crowds who had filled the bullrings for so long to see me fight were becoming tired of the very exactness and correctness by which I was trying to control my work. The same thing happened to Joselito, perhaps in an even greater degree. By keeping up our rivalry through several seasons we had reached a state of mastery in our craft which permitted us to give an impression of confidence that made it seem as if the risk of bullfighting had ceased to exist.

At this time, Joselito and I were intimate friends. We were fighting forty or fifty corridas together each year, and inevitably we found ourselves travelling on the same trains, staying in the same

hotels, and coming to each other's assistance in the arena. In the bullring, Joselito was the loyalest companion, and his cape was always the first to fly to the assistance of a comrade.

In those last seasons one could watch the evolution of Joselito's character. In the beginning, as I have said, he was not unjustifiably conceited, for life had brought him nothing but its best. Always surrounded by an exclusively bullfighting world, in which the torero is a kind of incontrovertible divinity, he lacked the humanity and understanding which comes from the struggle with a hostile environment and the contact with others who have different ideas from our own. But as he grew older and began to face the facts of life, he became more human. This transition from youth to manhood was plainer to me than to anyone, perhaps on account of the circumstances which bound us together.

During that season of 1919, when we were travelling alone together, we used to talk to each other with a brotherly intimacy and affection which would have seemed impossible to our rival fans. Joselito used to speak to me frankly about his troubles, his conflicts with the public, which were the same as mine, and even his love affairs. I would venture to say that his moments of greatest frankness and friendliness coincided with his amorous infatuations, in which this man to whom fortune had given everything else never had any luck. He was desperately in love with a girl of the highest Andalusian society, the daughter of a very well-known rancher, who stubbornly opposed the attachment. It was the first insuperable obstacle that Joselito had met, and the realisation of his impotence to alter the iron will of this father who was walled up in his impregnable prejudices of caste broke down Joselito's reserve.

Combined with this, there were the serious preoccupations of our art. Like myself, Joselito was deeply conscious of the necessity of

continuing to triumph and of maintaining indefinitely the name and reputation which had been so dearly won.

But this was the very reason why the public was tiring of us; and as I said, it was even more serious for Joselito than for me, because he gave even more than I did the impression that he fought without danger. And since he had enjoyed the favour of the public more than anyone else, the blow of this unjustified betrayal fell more heavily on him. The *aficionados* saw us filling the bullrings again and again, and since neither of us was killed by a bull they began to think they were being cheated.

On the eve of the tragedy of Talavera de la Reina, Joselito and I were fighting in Madrid. Something happened that afternoon which moved my companion deeply and filled him with a great bitterness.

13

On the 15th of May, 1920, Joselito, Sánchez Mejía, and I were fighting in Madrid in a corrida of Murube bulls. The public was furious with us that afternoon. The bulls were small, and the *aficionados* were protesting noisily even before the fight had started. Their irritation against Joselito and myself, which I have just been describing, reached its climax. We were fighting a great many corridas, nothing ever happened to us, we were being paid a lot of money, and the spectators were becoming convinced that we had eliminated all the risk of the fight and were enriching ourselves with impunity at their expense.

We were waiting in the courtyard for the beginning of the corrida when a group of enraged spectators came up to us, waving their tickets and shouting: "Thieves! Swindlers!"

They were joined by others who added their voices to the uproar. We were completely hemmed in by these scum who were hurling insults at us. Before an avalanche like that I could find nothing to do but shrug my shoulders philosophically; although I did grab one of those who was shouting loudest and retort: "If we're robbing you, why don't you tell the police?"

Joselito was deeply affected by this savage attack. He stood with his head bent for a long time, but at last he spoke to me.

"Listen, Juan: I've been meaning to talk to you about this before. We might as well face it now. The public is furious with us, and a day is coming when we shan't be able to go into the ring at all."

"What are we to do?" I asked.

"We've got to put a stop to it."

"You can count on me for anything."

"I think the best thing to do would be to give up fighting in Madrid for a season. We can't go on like this. The public is more exacting every day, and we can't do any more than we are doing. Let's give it up. We'll leave Madrid. Let them find some other toreros. They don't want us. Perhaps after a while we shall be able to come back in better conditions."

"If it goes on like this," I answered, "we shan't have any option."

Joselito remained wrapped in thought for a while longer.

"Yes," he said sadly. "We shall have to go. It's the best way."

These were the last words we exchanged. On the following day Joselito was booked to fight again in Madrid. He tore up the contract and went to a corrida in Talavera de la Reina. There he had a rendezvous with Death.

I also was to have fought in Madrid that day, but the fight was postponed and I stayed at home playing poker with some friends.

It was dusk when the telephone rang. Somebody answered it and reported:

"They say that Joselito has been killed by a bull in Talavera."

"Go on—hang up the telephone," I said, without looking up from the cards.

We went on playing. Shortly afterwards Antonio came in breathlessly and repeated the story.

"There's a rumour that Joselito has been killed by a bull in Talavera."

"Don't bring me any more of that nonsense," I replied crossly.

Sunday evenings were always full of rumours which afterwards turned out to be quite unfounded. They had recently stopped publishing Sunday newspapers, and the lack of definite information on the day's corridas was apt to start any number of scares in the bullfighting world.

But soon afterwards the telephone rang again. This time it was somebody of standing, a well-known rancher, who gave the terrible news.

"It's true! It's true!" he said, and the break in his voice could be heard over the line.

This dreadful certainty made us look at each other aghast. The cards fell on the table, and nobody could utter a word for several minutes. We were stunned.

One by one, my friends began to rise from their chairs and go out, still without speaking. I was left alone, huddled on a divan, staring stupidly at the empty chairs and the cards and chips littered over the cloth.

In my loneliness I heard the words repeated a thousand times, hammering ceaselessly inside my brain: "*Joselito has been killed by a bull. . . . Joselito has been killed by a bull.*" I was held speechless

by a terrible anguish. I looked around me, and I was afraid. Of what? I don't know. When my throat could no longer contain the flood of grief that welled up in me, I broke into sobs and wept as I have never wept in my life.

I would have liked to have gone on like that for a long time, for this strange action of weeping to which I had never surrendered myself since I was a child freed me from the pitiless dry hammer-beats that were still waiting to go on: "*Joselito has been killed by a bull . . . Joselito has been killed by a bull . . .*"

But I realised that in other ways it was only making things worse. Seeing me in tears like that, my wife was overcome and wept also. In other parts of the house my relatives and servants wept, so that I had a wild moment of despair when it seemed that it was for me and not for Joselito that they were mourning. I think I felt a little of my own death that day; and this egotistical reflection was what gave me the strength to pull myself together. I choked down the grief to which I had given way, and in a cold harsh voice I told the others to control themselves.

Dinner-time came; and with forced impassivity I sat down at the table, made my wife sit down with me, and told the servants to get on with their work. It was a grotesque parody of a meal. I made myself try to eat some salad, to set an example to the others, and the leaves stuck in my throat like straw. I kept my eyes fixed on the plate and pretended to go on eating, not daring to raise my head or look at my wife, who was trying desperately to keep back her tears. Once I did steal a glance at her, and caught such a look of terror in her eyes that I had no courage to look at her again.

Two days later there was another corrida in Madrid. I fought in it with Varelito and Fortuna, and the afternoon was one of the great triumphs of my life. It was the day when they took the body of

Joselito back to Sevilla. Because of his death, the public had suffered a strange reaction of collective remorse.

You could see how they had suddenly been awakened to an exaggerated nervousness and a fanatical anxiety for the lives of bullfighters. For some time afterwards the bullrings were gripped in an unprecedented tenseness. The public was more frightened than the torero. Every time that the matador faced a dangerous attack from the bull, an anguished gasp went up from the crowd. It seemed as if the same people who had been attacking us so viciously on the day before the tragedy of Talavera, because we hadn't allowed ourselves to be killed, felt themselves personally to blame for what had happened, and their belated regret forced them to try and avert a repetition of the disaster.

14

I fought almost every day during the season of 1920. I had a couple of accidents, in Sevilla and Barcelona, which kept me away from the arenas for some weeks and served to make even more evident this sudden new regard for the lives of bullfighters. In September I stopped fighting. The death of Joselito had thrown all the weight of the corridas on to me, and I began to feel exhausted again. Those who had taken sides so heatedly in our rivalry did not know how complementary and how necessary we had been to each other.

The rumour began to go round that I intended to retire; but the truth is that I have never thought of definitely leaving my profession. Even today, fifteen years afterwards, I don't think of it. I have passed through states of mind in which I have been obliged to

leave it temporarily alone; but however alarming my spiritual crises have been, and however unfavourable the circumstances have seemed, I have never seriously thought of ceasing to be a bull-fighter. In 1914, in answer to some questions which Gómez Carrillo put to me, I wrote to him: "I don't think I shall ever retire. When the *aficionados* put me on the shelf as old and done for I shall go on opening my cape wherever they'll let me—at charity corridas or in any little village or even at tentaderos."

Sheer persistence kept me going to the end of the season, although every day I felt more wearied and found it harder to triumph. Nevertheless, I was very successful in the Newspaper Association's corrida in Madrid on the 13th of July, and generally succeeded in my intention of maintaining my reputation to the close of the season—in which, in spite of the time that I was put out of action by my injury in Sevilla, I killed eightytwo bulls.

I had signed a contract for Mexico, and in the autumn I sailed for New York with my wife.

We went to Mexico by train. I was engaged for five corridas and a benefit, in all of which I fought without any success. I was at my worst. I found that the extraordinary altitude of Mexico City affected my lungs. In the arena, if I had to run after a bull even a little way, I choked and felt as if I were going to faint. I couldn't fight at all; and that disastrous season has always rankled in my memory. When I went there the first time I was not really seasoned; and when I was there again in 1921 I was in this period of exhaustion; so that to my great regret I have never been able to triumph in Mexico as the loyalty of the Mexican bullfighting public deserves. But I have already said that one cannot fight bulls at will.

At the end of the Mexican season we embarked for Peru on an old American ship, on which life was elaborately standardised. The

food which didn't come out of tins was made up of such American extravagances as fried oranges, to which our Spanish palates were unable to adapt themselves. It was fortunate that the great Calderón had conceived the idea of doing some business on the trip and had brought some dried Spanish hams which he hoped to sell to the Mexicans for their weight in gold. The Spaniard, or to be more exact, the Andalusian, places such an exaggerated value on his own things that his pity for the poor heathen who are deprived of them leads him to fall into such errors as Antonio's, when he thought that the people of Lima would be unable to live without sherry once they had tasted it, or Calderón's assumption that the Mexicans would fall over each other to get his hams. So we escaped the fried oranges, thanks to Calderón's hams and the skill which we rapidly acquired at fishing. Every time we stopped at a port, we cast our lines and cooked our catch as we wanted it in the ship's galley. In one port, my wife told Zapaterito to find us some fresh eggs. He went on to the jetty; and by dint of flattering an old woman, slapping an urchin on the back, telling the tale to a policeman, and flirting with some girls, he launched an army of emissaries to scour the city for eggs. He was so successful that half an hour later we found twenty or thirty people on the quay with baskets of eggs, and to avoid a riot we had to buy about ten dozen.

At the end of the voyage, as usually happens on such trips, the passengers and crew were like one family. The captain, a dry and dour American, became so fond of my daughter Yola, who was then very tiny, that he even forbade the use of the siren when we were entering or leaving harbours if she was asleep.

At one of the Central American ports we picked up a Spaniard who was going to Panama, where he intended to cross the Isthmus and go on to Spain. He told us that he had been in business for

some years in America, which surprised us considerably, for he had such a miserable and stupid face that it was impossible to believe that he could make a success of any business. He was a plump stocky man, with short legs and a perpetually frightened air, altogether such an absurd specimen that the toreros started pulling his leg from the first moment, and played such cruel practical jokes on him that sometimes I felt obliged to interfere. But for his part he was so pleased to have met these bullfighting compatriots that he not only endured their jokes but became so attached to them that he wanted to stay with us; and when we reached Panama, instead of continuing his journey to Spain, he yielded to our encouragements and decided to go on with us to Lima and see us fight.

In Lima he stayed apparently tied to our apron strings, until one day at the end of the season we discovered that he had disappeared. We were surprised that he had gone without saying goodbye; but not long afterwards we learned the reason. In Lima, where he had been introduced by us everywhere, and on the strength of the glamour attached to us, he had brought off about a dozen swindles, some of which were of considerable size. That was when we discovered how a man with such a stupid face could do business. The men of my cuadrilla realised it to their sorrow: he had swindled every one of them in some way.

In Lima, in contrast to my deplorable campaign in Mexico, I had a brilliant season. My surroundings must have influenced me, for Lima was like my own home: I had many good friends there, it was where I had found my wife, and I was treated with so much affection and met so many similarities with Spain that it gave me a new lease on life. All my corridas were successful. It cannot be doubted that bullfighting demands a suitable climate and a favourable atmosphere like any other art.

I took part in four corridas with Nacional and Valencia, and they were as many triumphs. When my pride had been restored and my obligations fulfilled, I sent my cuadrilla home—Catalino, Camero, Magritas, Maera, and Calderón—and went back to the United States, where my wife and I wandered wherever the whim took us and forgot all about bullfighting. It was about time.

15

*Qué suerte es poder tener
Un cortijo con parrales,
Pan, aceite, carne y luz,
Y medio millón de reales,
Y una mujer como tú.**

The popular Andalusian song sums up everything that the poor Andalusian labourer dreams of for his ideal of happiness; and naturally this had always been my own ideal.

Ten years of bullfighting had performed the miracle of placing it within my reach. I had bought La Capitana, a farm with vineyards which I saw for the first time when I came to it under the burning sun one afternoon, hungry and sore-footed, when I was setting out with my few fragile years to conquer the world. Lord and master of this farm, with money in the bank, and newly married, I was

* Which you might roughly translate:

No more than this would be delight:
A farm with vineyards spread like wings,
Bread and oil and meat and light,
And money for the simple things,
And you to love.

enchanted with the idea of devoting myself to the pursuit of my own simple ideal of happiness.

My career was in a period of crisis. The public was becoming still more difficult; and my weariness and discouragement were urging me to give up the struggle which I had carried on for so many years. I never thought of giving up bullfighting altogether, but I imagined that for some time I could lead a totally different life from the one I had led before.

I shut myself off as much as possible from any connection with bullfighting. I pretended that I was just a farmer, and thought of nothing but my olive plantations and my oil mill. To amuse myself, I tried to play the part of an English country gentleman. I put away my cowboy saddle and replaced it with an English one, changed my *zahones* for riding breeches, bought a raincoat and a pipe, and organised a football team among the labourers on my estate.

But in spite of these childish eccentricities, my life was not so diverting as I had hoped. I soon discovered that a man who has given all his life to one activity is far from happy when wealth allows him to give up the struggle. You think you are so unfortunate to have to go on working for your living, and you long for the day when you will be able to fold your hands and sit back and rest; but the truth is that there are few men who can resign themselves to this bourgeois paradise.

I started by being bored, and ended by becoming desperate. I roamed impatiently about my estate and felt like a prisoner locked up in a cell. I came to hate the work, and even the drab green of the olive trees started to make me sick. What I really wanted was to be a bullfighter.

The spring caught me in this state of mind. Someone was rash

enough to invite me to a tentadero. I played a few calves, and again the intoxication of the game seized me. I threw away my raincoat and my pipe and riding breeches, forgot about my olive trees, and plunged into the tentaderos like a boy who was just beginning. I was so anxious to fight that I used to get hold of my rancher friends and make them promise to hold their trials in secret, so that nobody else but myself would be there. One of them did carry out my wishes so faithfully that I had the trial absolutely to myself and had to play more than forty becerras in one day, giving each of them a faena with the cape and another with the muleta. I fought without a rest from seven o'clock in the morning until four in the afternoon. When I was almost suffocated I made them throw a pail of water over my head and went on fighting. In the end they carried me out in a heap. I couldn't even walk on my own feet.

Those who saw me fighting with so much enthusiasm began to talk about my return to the arena; but I hadn't made up my mind. It was still less than a year since I had announced my retirement in Lima, and it seemed like trifling with the public to come back without any good excuse.

About that time, a friend in Mexico commissioned me to buy a herd of cattle to be sent out there. After I had purchased a fairly considerable quantity of fine stock, difficulties arose in the matter of exporting them, and I had to take a pasture and become a temporary rancher. I plunged whole-heartedly into the job, and spent several months in the country with the bulls. Being a cowboy amused me more than being a farm hand, and it was then that the love of ranching really took hold of me. I thought that the ideal formula would be to own a ranch and fight and kill my own bulls. If I haven't carried it out, it is because I later discovered a serious snag. If I were a rancher and a torero at the same time, and I

fought badly, who would have to take the blame—Belmonte the breeder or Belmonte the bullfighter?

I spent the whole winter in the pasture. It was in the mountain ranges of Ronda; and when I rode over those wild hills with my lance on my shoulder, and dismounted from time to time to play a young bull with my coat, I thought I had really found my ideal environment.

When at last I shipped the herd off to my Mexican friend, I was left with a lot of grazing lands and a few bulls of my own. Inevitably my ranching interests raked me into the world of bullfighting again, and every day I was coming in contact with impresarios and toreros.

Still I couldn't make up my mind to return to the arena. Ignacio Sánchez Mejías, who was in the same plight, came to see me.

"I've been waiting a whole year for you," he said. "If you can't make up your mind, I've made up mine. I'm going to start again."

In the summer of 1924, I came out to fight on horseback in the Portuguese style at a charity festival in Sevilla. I also fought on horseback in Badajoz; and then I went to Zumaya, where my family were spending the summer.

In Zumaya, Zuloaga painted his famous picture of me, and I spent most of the summer in bullfighting costume in front of his easel. Zuloaga and some other friends organised a charity corrida there, in which I appeared with Algabéño, Fernando Gillis, and Cañero. One of the bulls gave me a wound which put me to bed for a month; and I was convalescing on my estate when the long-desired excuse for fighting again arrived.

They were celebrating the centenary of Peruvian independence in Lima that winter; and some friends there wrote and begged me to go and fight, and officially invited me to go there whether I fought or

not. I wrote back that it was still not yet two years since I had announced my retirement in Lima itself, and the *aficionados* who had attended my farewell might feel that they had been cheated. It was this scruple which had been deterring me for a long time. In a short while I received an answering cable offering me half a million pesetas to fight in seven corridas and telling me that the Lima newspapers were publishing enthusiastic articles begging me to return.

When I read this message I went mad with joy. I could be a bullfighter again! I danced round the room and rolled over on the ground. My family couldn't understand what it was all about, and when they knew they were not so pleased.

16

I reached Lima in the beginning of November, 1924. One of the first people I met was a Spaniard whom I had encountered previously in Havana. He was looking very prosperous and important. He explained to me that the Peruvian government had engaged one of the great enterprises which, as he said, he "controlled" to film the ceremonies of the Centenary. And he did appear at every one of them, with his frock-coat and his silk hat, directing a swarm of electricians and camera-men who were recording the brilliance of the festivities. Standing beside the camera, he ordered everybody about and moved cabinet ministers and generals from side to side like sheep. Not one of them dared to question the commands of this important director who was to publicise the glories of their Centenary over the whole world. What happened afterwards was that the great director disappeared overnight; and the Peruvians

never had the pleasure of seeing their festivities on the screen, for the simple reason that after he had collected the subsidy which had been allotted to him he had decided that it was much too extravagant to spend so much good money on films. So he had let his operators turn the handles of empty cameras, while the great personages of the country beamed and postured in front of them.

I happened to see him again in Havana; and when I ventured to criticise his conduct, he said that the Peruvians were liars and slanderers and that he would take action against anyone who dared to impugn his honour. He was a perfect Spanish gentleman.

In Havana he made famous another of the great enterprises which he "controlled." He founded a sort of co-operative bank or insurance company, in which the Spanish residents of Cuba could take out policies that after a certain number of monthly premiums would entitle them to a trip to Spain. It was an excellent idea. In Cuba there were many thousands of Spanish immigrants who dreamed of returning to the place where they were born, and most of them were growing old without any real hope of saving the necessary money for the trip. Our friend advertised his scheme all over the island with posters headed in large letters: "Don't die without going to Spain!" After spending a good time collecting the hundreds of subscriptions which flowed in and living like a prince on them, he disappeared again; and the unfortunate Spaniards went on dying without going back to Spain.

Another official guest was the great Spanish humorist Julio Camba. He hated ceremonies, and spent the whole time in a fearful temper. Evening dress was essential at the official functions, and since Julio Camba didn't possess such a thing he had to stay at the hotel. He avenged himself by writing bitter diatribes against the deplorable custom of wearing evening dress.

His literary reputation brought plenty of autograph-hunters after him; and the great humorist, in a worse humour than ever, took their albums and stacked them up in a corner of his hotel room with the determination of not writing a line in them.

"I've never written for nothing," he said. "Do they think that I've come to Peru to change one of my soundest rules?"

One morning, a hotel servant who came to call him took the opportunity of flattering Camba's literary vanity by saying that he was a reader and admirer of his. This servant was a supercilious and pedantic negro, who while he was flattering Camba took care to boast of his own great literary culture.

"So you know all about literature, do you?" asked Camba.

"I'm just an amateur, sir," answered the negro bashfully.

"What have you written poems about?"

"Would you like me to read you one?"

"No!"

Then Camba's eye fell on the waiting stack of albums, and he had a brilliant idea.

"Here you are," he said. "Take one of those books and write something of yours in it."

The negro hitched up his pants, and with his mouth twisted to one side and his tongue protruding he wrote in beautiful copper-plate a thought which was a marvel, a real classic, such as Camba had certainly never written in his life.

Camba read it, and for a moment was speechless with emotion. Then he embraced the negro.

"Take them," he said. "Take all these albums. Take them to the kitchen and write one of your thoughts in every one of them. And sign it 'Julio Camba.' From this moment you're my secretary."

The negro was overjoyed to receive such an honour, and did

what Julio Camba told him. I feel that I can tell this story now, because I have no doubt that the negro has already told it many times to everyone he has met.

17

I fought the seven corridas for which I was contracted, and one other, alternating with Paradas, Gitanillo, and my brother Manolo. Rafael Gómez, el Gallo, was also there, and a corrida was given for his benefit in which I fought. I received no injuries and fought with great success. It was a splendid season, which augured well for my return to the arena.

When the fiestas in Lima were over, I went to New York to pick up my wife, who had stayed there, and returned to Spain ready to make a fresh start.

When I got off the boat at Lisbon, I met Eduardo Pagés, and told him how I proposed to start fighting again. I had known Pagés for several years; he was, and is, a conscientious and enterprising man, and a master of the business side of bullfighting. He suggested a form of contract which I liked; and although millions of pesetas were involved, we reached our agreement in a few words and without needing to put anything in writing. Thereafter, Eduardo Pagés would be my only impresario.

I went to Sevilla to spend some weeks training for the coming season. I was so enthusiastic that I overdid it. I practised every day until I was worn out; and the ambition of making myself stronger than ever made me take to all kinds of physical exercises as well.

But I have never been a bullfighter of great stamina, and the

efforts I made to build up my strength only exhausted it. When the time came for the first corrida of the season, I could hardly move. At the slightest exertion, I choked and felt my strength ebbing out of me, so much so that I was afraid I might collapse at any moment.

I had to make a radical change in my way of living; and instead of using up my scanty energies by taking exercise, I spent the whole week lying down and only got up on Sundays to go to the bullring. I was so weak in those first corridas that after I had got into my costume I had to lie down again for an hour or two to get my breath before I went to the ring.

The third or fourth corrida in Sevilla was one in which I had to give the *alternativa* to Niño de la Palma. I went into the arena like a corpse, and received a great ovation because I fought without moving. I opened my cape in front of the bull and stood there playing it until it got tired and let me move slowly away, or until it left me itself. As soon as I made the slightest effort I had difficulty in breathing and had to hold on to the barrera to support myself.

Some of my friends who saw me fight on that occasion realised what a state I was in and tried to interfere. Among them was Dr Marañón, who examined me and told me point-blank what was the trouble. I was so anæmic that any wound I received might produce a fatal hæmorrhage.

My friends and relatives held a council of war at La Capitana and called me to order. I listened to them attentively and without contradicting them, as much because I didn't want to seem ungrateful for their concern as because I didn't want to waste any more energy in arguing with them. They spoke of placing me under treatment, and even suggested an operation; but as that meant that I should have to give up fighting for two or three

months, and I had staked all my hopes on that season, I just let them talk—and went on fighting.

I came to my own conclusions. It all boiled down to economising my strength until I could recover. Bullfighting doesn't demand so much energy: the spirit is enough. It was simply a matter of fighting quietly and gently. I got up from my bed to go to the arena, and only walked the half-dozen necessary paces from the barrera to cite the bull. When the animal went away, I quietly folded the muleta and walked slowly after it. The only result of this was to give a much more sombre atmosphere to my technique. But I could still fight bulls. Who said that you need legs for that?

My family didn't want me to go on fighting, and every time they were more afraid. The only member of my household who has never thought that life would be possible without bullfighting is Antonio, who has always considered my seasons of retirement as mere brief parentheses of no importance. He still goes on believing—and he may be right—that every year when the spring comes we shall set out again on our pilgrimage from FERIA to FERIA, he with the basket of swords and implements and I with my street cloak thrown over my weary shoulders. And I think that all he can imagine of the future is that even when we are both very old and grey we shall still be wandering from arena to arena in fulfilment of our eternal missions, he of his and I of mine. I can't see it quite so simply myself, but experience has made me cautious, and sometimes I'm afraid that it is Antonio who really sees the truth.

In 1925 I was convinced that I should soon stop fighting. "In a little while," I was thinking, "I shall be forty, and when you get to that age you can't go on fighting. I shan't have retired capriciously, but just because age compels it." But I'm now long past forty and still in the fight. . . .

To try and ease my family's anxiety I had to persuade them that I was practically invulnerable to the horns of bulls. I hinted that I had a marvellous talisman which made me immune. For ten or twelve years, all Spain had been saying every day that a bull was going to kill me; but my more nimble companions had succumbed and I was still unharmed. This talisman was a plausible explanation. My family watched me go on fighting year after year, and if they didn't come to believe completely in my invulnerability they pretended that it was true.

But for me the fight was more difficult and dangerous every time, for an artist is judged by his intentions almost as much as by his results. When I started fighting again, people were asking themselves: "Why has this man come back? Because he likes it? Because he has to? Because he wants more money?" Nobody disputes that a painter or a writer may go on working all his life; but the risk which is bound up with the art of bullfighting seems incompatible with maturity and prosperity. People can't imagine any stimulus other than necessity or greed which would make a man who has already achieved success go on risking his life between the horns of a bull.

This reasoning did me a lot of harm. During the seasons of 1925, 1926, and 1927, the public went to see me fight with the conviction that I was only trying to exploit my reputation. "Belmonte," they said, "has only come back for money. It's only logical that he should want to fight the greatest possible number of corridas with the least possible risk, and resign himself to losing a little of his good name in each one of them in exchange for a few thousand pesetas."

I was torn between what the public wanted me to be and what my own conscience made me. It is true that I often lacked the

youthful enthusiasm which used to convert good faenas into delirious triumphs; it is true also that when I was fighting I could see coldly how much of the art was pure hack work, the commonplace exercise of a craft; but I had the spirit to overcome these things, to fight each time with a greater faith and sense of responsibility. If there is any achievement in my life which I am proud of, it is to have kept in form for those three seasons and finally to have convinced the crowd that it was possible for one to have other motives than hypocrisy and materialism.

For bullfighting was the profession which I had chosen of my own free will, and I could see no reason why I should give it up so long as I was able to fight. Why should that be so strange? It was my only useful purpose in life.

18

"Don't you bullfighters ever hear what the spectators say about you?" I was once asked.

"What the public doesn't hear," I replied, "is what we say about them."

I don't deny that the public is sometimes right; but so is the bullfighter. The bullfighting public has been universally rated as an example of mob passions at their worst; but my own contrary belief is that they are only giving expression to their sincere feelings.

On the other hand, considered individually, they have a different aspect. There are some types who are absolutely abominable, and whom the torero would cheerfully assassinate.

One of these is the *aficionado* in a village where they only hold

one corrida a year, who wants to take advantage of it to show how much he knows. While the rest of the crowd is applauding and enjoying itself, this expert who only sees one bullfight in a season feels himself bound to demonstrate his superiority by disagreeing with them. Nothing the bullfighter does is any use. This *aficionado* has gone to the bullring to get himself known as a severe critic, and the most divinely inspired faena would still arouse his noisy disapproval.

Another type who infuriates me is the city *aficionado* who is easily satisfied in his own bullring; but who, when he attends a provincial corrida, tries to make the natives look small by showing his disagreement with everything that pleases them.

"We're not all yokels here," he yells complacently from his seat; and one feels like wringing his neck.

I met one of these specimens at a corrida in Segovia. Whenever the Segovians were applauding me, this man would lean on the parapet shaking his head superciliously and booming: "No, Juan, no!"

He annoyed me so much that I brought the bull close to where he was and gave it eight or ten passes with the muleta which I thought were irreproachable. When I looked up at him I saw him still shaking his head emphatically.

"No, Juan, it won't do. I don't like it."

I became nervous and ended by getting gored. When they were carrying me to the infirmary, I pulled myself together as I passed by him and shouted: "Are you satisfied now?"

But I have never seen anything like the Asturian *aficionado* at a corrida in Gijón, who kept on shouting "Closer!" when I was fighting two inches from the horns. Every time I heard that stentorian shout of "Closer!" in the silence of the arena I became

more angry; for the fact was that I have rarely worked closer to a bull than I was working then.

After the corrida, when I was in the car on my way back to the hotel, I saw him in the stream of people who were leaving the bullring. I hadn't forgotten him so quickly.

"Get me that man," I said to my cuadrilla.

They grabbed hold of him and without any explanation bundled him into the car.

"Where have you seen anyone fight closer?" I demanded, shaking my fist in his face. "Tell me when, damn you! Who was it?"

He looked at me with a smile on his wide idiotic face.

"Oh, no," he answered. "I wasn't asking you to fight closer to the bull. I wanted you to come closer to where I was sitting so that I could have a good view."

19

I returned to bullfighting in the deplorable state of health to which I have referred, but gradually I recovered my strength. I began the season in June and only fought some twenty corridas. In the following year I fought thirtyseven, in spite of four or five gorings, none of which were serious. In 1927 I took part in thirty-five corridas; and I can say that in spite of the severity of the public my reputation grew instead of diminishing.

In those days I only fought one corrida in each town, which made my appearance something of an event. I received at least twentyfive thousand pesetas for killing two bulls, and never appeared twice in the same bullring during the season. The disadvantage of this was that if I had an unlucky afternoon I had

no chance to remove the bad impression. Normally a bullfighter contracts for three or four corridas in each bullring, so that he always has six or eight bulls from which to hope for a triumph that will obliterate the memory of half a dozen faenas which were mediocre or even frankly bad. I had only my two bulls with which to achieve success; and this explains my own vanity about those campaigns.

It is easy to see what it means to fight under such conditions. The public expects to see something marvellous, and it isn't enough merely to do well. I remember that in one corrida, when I returned to the barrera after killing my bull as best I could, while the spectators were cheering me, one of those know-alls whom I have mentioned said to me disgustedly:

"You were brave enough, but that's all."

"Don't you think that's something?" I retorted indignantly.

I don't think the public itself knew what it was expecting in those fights.

In the last corrida of 1927, in Barcelona, a bull gave me a bad wound in the thigh. I was taken to a nursing home where I was under treatment for a month. It was one of the most pleasant months of my life. I began to think that the happiest way to spend one's days was lying peacefully in bed recovering from a goring. But when, against my will, the doctors passed me as cured and sent me home, I had my family to cope with. Their faith in my talisman was destroyed, and I hadn't the moral courage to try and keep up the legend.

The time had come to retire.

I went to Utrera with my wife and daughters, and settled down at La Capitana, much more resigned than I had been the first time that I left the arena. The years take their toll. I was able

to find enough distraction in the work of my ranch, and even learnt how to make a successful business of it. The friends I had made during my years of struggling came to see me at La Capitana; and there I was happy.

At that time they began to call me "Don Juan" and to address me as "El Señor." When I first heard this "El Señor" I couldn't believe that it was addressed to me. I was not used to being spoken to in the third person. The "Don Juan" was just as surprising. I had always been just plain "Juan": why should they give me the title of Don? I looked in the mirror. Yes, the years had taken their toll. I was serious, almost grave, with lines on my forehead and a sober air. The hare-brained little boy of Tablada had disappeared for ever. I had the face of a Don.

But although one gets used to everything, the compliment which touches me most deeply is quite the reverse. When I walk through a street in Sevilla, and a boy who sees me nudges his companion, and I hear him whisper: "Look, there's Juan!"—that nudge and the simple and unadorned "Juan" that goes with it gives me an indescribable feeling of satisfaction and pride.

I am no good at ordinary social life. I have an instinctive repugnance for the conventions that ordain what you must do and say as if you were a piece of machinery; and from this point of view I am not a sociable man. I don't know how to talk to children—perhaps because I have never been a child. On great occasions I always say the wrong thing. In one corrida in which I had fought with great success and had been awarded an ear, I was summoned to the royal box and congratulated by the king. It was about the time of the disaster of Annual in the Riff war, and my brother Manolo had been sent to Africa as a soldier. King Alfonso inquired after him.

"Let's hope he will be lucky and successful too," he said.

"Yes," I answered. "Perhaps they will give him an ear as well."

"What do you mean?" asked the king crossly.

"I mean—I mean the ear of some Moor—since your majesty hoped he would be successful," I stammered confusedly, knowing that I had made a *faux pas*.

Apart from this gift for saying the wrong thing, and my hatred for ceremony and etiquette, I have another fatal disadvantage in social life, which is that I can never accustom myself to accept social gradings which seem wrong to me. For instance, I cannot help being respectful to those who are older than I; I cannot use the familiar "thou" to an old man, whatever his class. I feel the same about all who are masters of their craft, however humble it may be. I always use the polite form of address to a bricklayer or a cobbler, even if they are in my employ, and it doesn't offend me in the least if they call me "thou" in return, if they are prompted by friendliness. In the country I have many cowboys who call me "thou," and it has never occurred to me to correct them. On the other hand, it annoys me a little to be called "thou" by other people when I feel that they are talking down to me.

The same things have happened to me with democratic rulers as with royalty. Once President Leguía was chaffing me amiably, but when I kept up the joke in the same tone it didn't seem to please him. On another occasion, President Obregón welcomed me with a hearty "Hello!" and the smile was wiped off his face when I answered "Hello!" with the same cheerfulness.

Decidedly I have no courtly graces. It can only be a legacy from those anarchists of the Altozano who used to go out to Tablada with me to fight bulls under the moon.

For a while I lived peacefully, enjoying the prosperity which had come to me, throwing myself unreservedly into the cultivation of my land and the care of my herds. I played my calves to amuse myself and my friends, and I had a horse which gave me an excuse to fight and kill an occasional novillo in the Portuguese style at the charity festivals to which I was invited.

But it is only at the end of a novel, and then only because it is the end, that anyone lives happily ever after. I began to be afraid of being so happy. In 1930 my castle of happiness came to the ground. My wife fell seriously ill; and at the same time the social and political developments in Spain gave me frequent grounds for disgust and anxiety. I had invested the money which I had earned from bullfighting in land and cattle: I was one of what they called the landed gentry—that is to say, a member of the very class against which the revolution was directed.

In these critical circumstances, my wife's illness forced me to leave my farm and take her to Switzerland, where I stayed for several months while she was undergoing the drastic treatment and dangerous operations which were necessary to save her life. Meanwhile the Republic had been proclaimed, and the credulous country folk of Andalucía imagined that the hour of equal division of property had struck. Almost overnight, I found myself on the point of losing everything. It was the most harassing period I have gone through. I spent my time travelling between Switzerland and Utrera, hounded by the misfortunes which gave me no rest wherever I went.

On the 14th of April the situation was not so bad. In the

villages of Andalucía there was a general rising of the country people who believed that the day of social and economic equality had dawned. The dream which had been nurtured by anarchistic pamphlets was going to become a reality. The rich farmers fled from their estates in terror, and the triumphant proletariat made themselves masters of the villages.

At first they were satisfied to be able to shout and brawl without getting into trouble with the police, and to be able to go about the country taking revenge for ancient injuries and stealing whatever they could under the guise of expropriation. Nevertheless, their depredations were guided by a certain spirit of justice.

A significant incident occurred to me. A servant of mine was leading some horses when he was stopped by a group of revolutionaries who thought it would be good and proper for the Republic to take over my stables; but one of them objected.

"These horses ought to go back to their owner," he said. "They belong to Juan Belmonte, and we ought to respect his possessions."

"Why?"

"Because his capital was well earned. The revolution only ought to attack capital that has been wrongly come by."

And right there, in the village square, they plunged into a theoretical discussion about the limits and forms and causes of lawful expropriation, as a result of which they let the groom go on his way with the horses unmolested. When I heard this story I can't deny that I was flattered, and I thought that perhaps things weren't so bad as they were said to be.

But the spirit of revolution evolved rapidly. The 14th of April did not mark the dawn of communism; and when Madrid tried to make this plain to the Andalusian labourers their disappointment made the struggle between rich and poor fiercer and more

embittered. Their hatred of the landowner increased, irrespective of whether he was good or bad, but simply because he was a landowner; and the country was invaded by gangs of expropriators who, although they gave themselves the airs of anti-capitalist crusaders, were really nothing but rogues and vagabonds. There have always been country bandits and cattle thieves in Andalucía; but never before, not even in the period of legendary brigandage, had they claimed to be the executors of social justice. Robbery was no longer a crime, and nobody was ashamed to commit it. Men who had worked honestly all their lives went out into the country to steal, and were proud of doing it.

One afternoon, on the estate of Anastasio Martín, I witnessed an extraordinary sight. A stream of people, men, women, and children, were toiling up and down the path from the estate to the village, bringing up empty sacks with them and taking them back full of olives.

"What are they doing?" I asked.

"They've come to pick the olives," I was told.

"But how can they do that when the scale of pay for picking hasn't been settled yet?"

It was explained to me.

"No, they aren't collecting the olives for the landlord, they're just collecting for themselves. They're purely and simply robbers."

"But what do they do with the olives?"

"They sell them to the village taverns. Since the stuff is stolen, they only get fifteen céntimos a kilo."

"And how much are they asking the landlord as wages for picking?"

"They're supposed to get twentyfive céntimos a kilo if they're paid by piecework."

"Then it looks perfectly simple to me," I replied. "Let's go and buy the olives they're stealing at twenty céntimos a kilo, and we shall get them picked at less than the union rates."

This elementary deduction caused great excitement. Not only Spanish newspapers, but papers in other countries, commented on it and said that I was adopting the procedure on a large scale. But it was really nothing but a revelation of the grotesque turn which the revolution had taken in Andalucía.

This alone will explain better than anything the worry and disillusionment which I was caused by my position as a landowner. It was no longer a matter of attacking oppressors and usurers: it was a direct attack on the landowner for the mere crime of owning land. One of my tenants brought an action against me for a reduction of his rent, and I attended the hearing to see what Republican justice was like. My tenant solemnly alleged that he ought to pay me less rent simply because I had made my money very easily as a bullfighter, and because I was spending my income happily in Switzerland.

Things had undergone a radical change. The same men who at the proclamation of the Republic had hesitated to seize my horses because I had earned my money by honest work, stole them a year later without any theoretical scruples.

The panic spread through the farms and villages. The landowners took refuge in the cities, and for months nobody who was moderately well off ventured to show his face in the country. With my family in Switzerland, I stayed alone on my estate and watched to see where all this would stop.

Some friends from Madrid—Zuloaga, Julio Camba, Juan Cristóbal, and another—came to spend a few days with me at La Capitana; and they arrived in terror of what they had

seen on their way through the small towns.

"The whole countryside is in arms," they said.

"They're going to destroy everything!"

"They'll attack you next!"

"This is the end!"

They were so frightened that it amused me to add to their alarm. I think that all the Andalusians, rich and poor, bourgeois and revolutionary, took a delight in frightening everybody else, including themselves, with the horrors of the revolution. That night, when my friends went to their rooms, each of them found a rifle beside his bed.

"What's this for?" they asked.

"So that you can defend your lives if they attack the farm during the night."

"Do you think that will happen?"

"Who knows? Haven't you seen for yourselves how they're bursting to exterminate the landowners?"

"Then we shall sell our lives dearly!"

I don't think these jokes amused my friends so much. One night we were sitting around the fire when there was a terrific uproar which made one think that the revolutionaries were certainly attacking the farm with dynamite or something like it. But it hadn't come to that yet. It was simply some modest expropriators who were removing the hens from the chicken runs so clumsily that they had unintentionally produced that alarming din. I wanted to make a complaint at the revolutionary headquarters about the incompetence of the officials of the bird-collecting squad.

But although the terrorist aspect of the revolution was impressive, the reality was not what it seemed. It all boiled down to the thefts and scares which the workmen inflicted on landowners who had

behaved harshly towards them: they painted skulls and crossbones on the doors of their houses, marked whatever they possessed with the traditional black hand and the hammer and sickle of the Soviet, stole as much as they could, and sometimes hamstringed the cattle. There were times when their hatred of the landowner was not contented with these damages and nuisances, but generally speaking the rebellion of the country people went no further.

The real drama was the economic ruin of the countryside which was brought about by the innumerable strikes. The worst of these were the strikes in sympathy with other strikers. No sooner had an agreement been signed between the employers and the workers, after the most laborious discussion and bargaining, when there would be a strike in sympathy with some other union and the crops would be left standing. The first years of the Republic ruined the country labourers, and it will be a long time before the problem is solved.

I myself even tried to institute some kind of collectivism on my own lands. Apart from their daily wages, I gave my employees fifty per cent of the profits to divide. But it was no use. Since the labourers could no longer quarrel with me, they quarrelled among themselves, and those of one municipal district were everlastingly bringing lawsuits against those of another. My experiment in collective exploitation ended in a free fight.

Between the troubles of my position as a landowner and the anxieties of my wife's illness, I reached a state of unrest which made me think that perhaps I should be happier if I

plunged back into the struggle of bullfighting, which absorbs everything.

I was in Switzerland with my family at the end of 1933 when I received a telegram from my impresario, Eduardo Pagés, asking me to meet him in Paris. I went there convinced that I was going to fight again.

Eduardo Pagés told me about the difficult situation in which he had been placed by the lawsuit which he was bringing against the breeders of bulls. They had placed a ban on him and were on the way to ruining him. He felt that if he could count on me it would be easier for him to defend himself. Abuses of power have always aroused my indignation; and if I still had any doubts, my friend's trouble finally overwhelmed them. I knew I should have to fight again.

When I think about bullfighting, I never remember the triumphal corridas, the fashionable bullrings with my friends at the barrera and pretty women in the balconies. For me, it means the village bullring crowded with fair-goers, bawling themselves blue in the face from the stands and insulting me like maniacs. Fighting a vicious beast in this atmosphere of passion and bitterness is for me the truth about bullfighting. This was the vision that came to my eyes when I arrived in Paris to meet Pagés.

But although I told Pagés and everybody else that I was going to fight again, nobody really believed it and I wasn't quite sure of it myself. Two or three times I went out for a walk and my steps led me mechanically to the door of the tailor who makes my bullfighting costumes. I walked past the shop several times, until one day, as if I were stepping off a high diving board, I went in and ordered two *trajes de luces*. The die was cast.

I went to Andalucía and began my training. I am certain that

the reason why I still go on fighting is simply on account of the influence of keeping in training, which begins by being a pleasant country exercise and ends up by leading me almost imperceptibly into the public arena. My ranch makes it easy for me to train in comfort. I start by playing a couple of calves, the smallest and easiest I can get, and go on increasing the ration from day to day until I have gradually accustomed myself again to the larger and more dangerous animals; and I finish by killing two or three bulls a few days before I appear in public.

One of the most difficult things in the business is to get used to the costume. It is very heavy, and unless you were accustomed to wearing it you would hardly be able to move after you had been stuffed into it. For this reason I always complete the last stages of my training in full costume. On one occasion it happened that when I was fighting in the country a young cow caught one of the lads who worked on the farm and we had to rush him into the town for treatment. I took the wheel of the car just as I was and drove through the streets in search of the doctor—to the astonishment of the populace, who must have taken me for a lunatic.

I started the season at Nîmes, and the event drew thousands of *aficionados* from all over the south of France. I remember how that afternoon, when I was already dressed for the ring, the impresario came in and saw me with the cape over my arm.

"Now I really believe that you're going to fight again," he said. But I knew only too well what was going on in my own mind. "This is just the time when I don't believe it," I answered.

Fear has never left me. It is always there—my inseparable companion.

Once again I was swept away in the eternal struggle, caught up in the machinery of bullfighting. The public received me well,

but with a certain reserve. They were determined to judge cold-bloodedly whether I was going to cheat them or earn my pay at the honest risk of my life. Fighting was harder than ever, and the responsibility even greater. I was the pivot of every fight, and I could never be unaware of two thousand eyes jealously watching for the slightest lack of skill or conscientiousness. It was difficult to convince them, for the idea that I could fulfil my obligations unstintingly contradicted the conclusions they had already come to; and besides that, they had paid high prices for their seats.

*In these last two seasons, I don't know if it is for this reason or because the psychology of the *aficionado* has changed, I have felt that the spectators were there with a paper and pencil to audit accounts with the torero. They were more concerned with the torero's financial interest than with what he was doing. In other days, the *aficionados* used to comment on whether one fought with the right or the left hand; but now they were more interested in the size of the gate and the percentage which the bullfighter would collect. This means that the public is much less susceptible to enthusiasm; although it is still true that when the *aficionado* sees something in the arena which thrills him he throws away his paper and pencil, forgets the gate and the percentage, and applauds as loudly as ever.

Nevertheless, this universal preoccupation with the torero's earnings is the most annoying thing in the business. When times are bad and nobody is earning much, the spectators feel a subconscious prejudice against anyone who is earning a lot. What makes it worse is that they look at the bullfighter's finances in the light of what he collects, without considering how much he has to spend. And a bullfighter's money vanishes like smoke. I, for instance, dare not check an account, or argue or haggle over any transaction.

"But what does a little difference like that make to you!" is the invariable reply.

This cheerful conception of a torero's money is so deeply rooted that even the State itself subscribes to it. Not long ago I wanted to question the rate of tax which had been arbitrarily assessed against me, and I was amazed when the collector answered, like everybody else: "But, my dear fellow, what does it matter to you? You've only got to fight a couple of extra corridas and it's all settled."

Which is exactly why it was not all settled like that. I refuse to allow the State to hold these lavish ideas about my property. It may happen that I have to fight in aid of some of the unfortunate people who, when all is said and done, form part of the pedestal which supports the bullfighter; but I refuse to give one single *verónica* for the benefit of the State.

Epilogue

I AM a bad theoriser. I don't know how to describe what I do to a bull, and I shall not attempt to put forward a comprehensive theory of bullfighting which any of the expert judges of the art could certainly do better than I. But having come to the end of these memoirs of mine I feel bound to say something about the way I understand and practise my art.

Bullfighting is one of the few activities in Spain which can allow itself the luxury of maintaining a perfected system of criticism. The theorist and the doctrinaire of the art of bullfighting exist in greater profusion perhaps than those of the arts of painting or literature or music. The explanation is simple. Bullfighting is a business which commands a greater popular interest than the *beaux arts*, and its social and economic prosperity is able to support highly-paid critics and theorists.

This is not to say that bullfighting critics are necessarily venal. The venality of reviewers who frankly mould their criticisms according to how much the bullfighter pays them, and the nuisance of publicity agents with their modern methods of propaganda, is a secondary consideration which has nothing to do either with art or criticism. The only problem it presents is that it is ruinous for the torero; and a time will come—I believe it has come already—when bullfighting will no longer be a paying business.

Criticism is something else. There may be certain critics who are mercenary; but I have not known any of them. I have systematically refused to meet them. Personally, I have never been

capable of bribing anyone, and no one can ever say that I have ever done so.

I remember one occasion when my manager suggested that I personally ought to give a certain sum of money to an influential critic. I refused. If he was really an honest man who wrote what he sincerely felt, I needn't attempt to bribe him. If he was only another of the reviewers who write what you want at so much a line, he could come to terms with the manager or the *mozo de espadas*. I have never recognised the existence of a man to whom one has to give money on the sly; but I have had to resign myself to my manager's recommendations that one man or another should have his palm greased. What I object to is only hypocrisy. In the case I am referring to, Juan Manuel told me that the critic in question was one of those who accepted subsidies, but on condition that it was kept dark.

"When you go to San Sebastián," said Juan Manuel, "he will be there. You'll pretend to meet him by accident and give him so much."

"I wouldn't have the nerve to do it," I answered. "It may offend him, and it would certainly offend me."

"Nonsense. You've nothing to be afraid of."

"But didn't you say that this fellow is supposed to be an honest man?"

"Don't be so innocent. He's like all the others. The only difference is that he wants to swim and keep his clothes dry."

"Then look here," I said. "If he's really an honest man I can't bribe him, and if it's a matter of dealing with some sort of polite blackmailer, that's what I keep you for. So you look after it yourself."

Apart from corruptions like this, which I have mentioned only

to avoid leaving my memoirs with any pretended ignorance of what goes on behind the scenes of bullfighting, I must repeat my high esteem of the real theorists of the art. Thanks to them, it has reached a state of perfection which would be difficult to surpass. I believe that bullfighting has acquired a literature of its own which deserves appreciation; and anything that I can say about it, being only a practising torero, has nothing but the limited value of one man's personal experience.

Many laymen, and, what surprises me more, certain professionals, have cast doubts on what I have referred to in this book as bullfighting in the country; so I should like to be a little more particular about this technique. These remarks may be well-timed, because I am told by some rancher friends of mine that by describing my days in Tablada in this biography I have helped to revive the practice among the lads of Sevilla after it had been almost forgotten for many years. So although my friends may not thank me for it, I should like to tell the boys of today how it is done, or at least how we used to do it.

It is a fact, as everyone ought to know, that the bull in the open country does not attack a man. The only bull which attacks is the outcast rogue, who has left the herd after losing a fight with another bull. Cows which have recently calved will also nearly always charge. But the normal thing is that the free bull is not naturally ferocious.

The bull only decides to charge when it is obliged to, when it is cornered and has no other way out, or when it is tired of running away. Therefore in order to make it fight you must first tire it and then convince it that its only chance of escape is to attack. Naturally, to tire a bull by chasing it over the open country is practically impossible for one man alone, because he will always

tire before the bull. In order to overcome this difficulty, you resort to strategy.

When you are walking through the country and you meet a suitable bull, all it does is to turn round and retreat in the direction which its instinct indicates. We would stop it by spreading ourselves out in open formation along the line which we thought it would take, forming a kind of human wall along its chosen route. When the first lad got into its way, the bull would make a detour to try and avoid him and continue its escape in the same direction. But when it got back on to its line of retreat, it would meet the second boy, who forced it to turn aside again. So they would go on appearing one after another along the whole length of the bull's retreat. Meanwhile, the first boy, as soon as he had performed his task of turning the bull aside, would turn diagonally back and overtake the bull while it was eluding the others; so that when the bull had evaded the last lad in line it would meet the first again. Thus we formed a human chain which allowed us to chase the bull all the way across the pasture without exerting ourselves. When the animal at last became tired and annoyed and made up its mind to fight, the boy whom it charged had to stand his ground empty-handed and keep avoiding the attacks until we had all caught up with him and could begin fighting. Sometimes, if the animal was small and not very fierce, one could seize it by the head and twist its neck until it fell, holding it down like this until the others arrived. If you take hold of a bull in a certain way it loses all its strength and falls easily, and you can keep it down with quite a moderate effort. Then we would form a ring and play it until it was worn out and refused to charge any more.

Our technique in this sport became almost perfect. I remember that one of the guards of Tablada, who thought he knew all about

bulls, refused to believe that we could play them in the open country, and in order to see it proved he allowed us to give an exhibition one day under his very nose.

All the same, I don't think that we had invented anything. That pursuit of the animal by men with no other advantages than the speed of their legs, the strength of their arms, and their superior intelligence, is probably the same procedure which was followed by the caveman who hunted the bull, barefooted and naked like ourselves, to kill and eat it. It must have been the origin of bullfighting itself as it may well have been practised by the mythical inhabitants of Atlantis.

Now, thousands of years later, we all eat the bull, and naturally bullfighting has come to a stage of decadence. Everything that can be achieved has been done. The bull of today has no more interest: it has been dominated and conquered.

Of course it is not a matter of mastering the bull in order to eat it, but of mastering it in order to play gracefully with its blind instincts and thus produce a spectacle of beauty and emotion. And yet even this has been achieved so perfectly that the corridas are less interesting every time. The mastery has been reached by successive stages. Perhaps I was one of them. After me, there have been others. Each stage leaves the bull more completely dominated. The torero does what he likes with it. If one bullfighter, after a few passes, grasps the bull by the horn, another bullfighter comes after him and seizes it by the horn without having played it first, when the animal has just come out of the pen in its full freshness of vigour. Later on comes someone else who seizes it by the ear, and finally someone appears who holds it by the nose. Every day somebody goes a step further, so that about the only thing left is for the torero to take bites out of the

bull and eat it alive. Progressing in this direction, the fight is doomed to become more like a circus performance. It will be emasculated. The beauty of the fiesta will still be there; but the drama, the emotion, the supreme anguish of the savage struggle, will have been lost. Already the fiesta is decadent.

The technique of bullfighting goes on becoming more perfect; every day men are fighting better, more artistically, closer to the bull, with a skill that has never been seen before. Today there are many toreros of unsurpassable merit, any two of whom would make a pair of stars worthy to rank with the famous names who thrilled the public thirty or forty years ago. And yet the bullfight goes on losing interest.

On the same scale as the art of bullfighting has been evolving and perfecting itself in the sense of giving more beauty to the fiesta, the bull, which in the beginning was unplayable and lacking in all the indispensable qualities on which the bullfighter could exercise his art as we understand it today, has also been evolving. We might say that the bull has been learning how to be fought. It is as highly cultivated, as completely trained in the speciality for which destiny has ordained it, as a university professor is for his vocation; as different from its ancestor in the prehistoric swamps of the Guadalquivir as the torero of today is different from the caveman who went out naked and unarmed to hunt the beast for food.

The fighting bull of today is a product of civilisation, a standardised industrial article like Coty perfumes or Ford cars. The bull is manufactured according to popular demand. Thanks to a slow and painstaking process of selection, the breeders have succeeded in meeting the wishes of the public by turning out bulls which are perfect instruments for the fight. I think that

in the manufacture of bulls the Stradivarius has already arrived.

This does not mean that the bulls are inferior in danger or power or courage to those which used to be fought. To say that the bulls of today are harmless is nothing but pretentious blah. It is not true that the breeder has contrived with his selections and crossed strains to eliminate danger: what he has done is to polarise it in the direction which the fight requires.

The bull has lost none of its strength; it has as much strength today as it had half a century ago. *Aficionados* who sadly recall those corridas of bygone days in which a bull would knock over and disembowel six or eight horses in the arena forget that the protective padding which is insisted on by our present laws, and which does positively save the lives of the poor brutes, also prevents the bull from attacking the horse with the same facility as before. They think that the bull is less powerful because when it charges the horse it doesn't knock it over easily; but the fact is that what used to bring down the horse was not so much the impact of the bull as the wound which the bull's horn used to open in its stomach. In other days, fighting bulls were reared on grass, not on grain as they are now. Thus it happened that in the month of May,

*Cuando los toros son bravos,
Los caballos corredores,**

as the song says, the bull was very strong and powerful; but for the rest of the year, the animals that came out in the arena could hardly carry their tails. With the diet on which it is reared today, the bull which comes out to fight in the arena in November is

* *When bulls are brave
And horses swift.*

stronger than the bulls which were fought in May thirty years ago.

The bull is just the same fierce and well-armed wild animal that it was before; but its development has been one-sided towards making the fight more pleasing to the eye. It is not true that it has lost courage. The modern bull charges much more often than the old one, although it is true that it does less damage. I doubt whether one of the bulls which were fought years ago could stand the strenuous faenas of today, with the number of passes with the cape which the public demands, the padded horses, the inevitable *quites*, and the amount of work which is now usually done with the *muleta*. Its courage has not been taken away, but its spirit has. The spirit only serves to make the fight more difficult, and fighting is what the spectator is most concerned to see.

The objective has been to breed a bull which will provide more brilliant but no less dangerous corridas. Something similar occurs with the ageing of the bull. A three-year-old bull is as dangerous as a five-year-old, but it is more adapted to be played with brilliance. The public does not want unplayable bulls. I have seen all the spectators rise in a body and call me a suicide because I insisted on fighting an animal which in their judgment did not combine the necessary qualities for the fight. The breeders who made themselves famous for the difficulty with which their bulls were fought have disappeared, not because the torero rejects them, but because the public does not want them either. What *aficionado* would go today to see a corrida of Palha bulls? Isn't it significant enough that the herds of Santa Coloma have been sold for meat? What has happened to the breeds of Parladé, Saltillo, and so many others?

The public wants a bull which is easy to play, and for this

reason it prefers the three-year-old. The reason is obvious. The three-year-old bull lends itself better to the art simply because it charges straight. Until it gets older, the bull's horns have not opened completely, and it has not learned to hook. In the novillo, the horns point straight ahead, and for this reason it is accustomed to wound with a straight forward movement. Later on, when it has lived longer in the pasture and has learned more about fighting from its battles with other bulls, when it knows how to hook to right and left and has learned to defend itself with something more than uncontrolled instinct, it gores in quite a different manner. But the old and expert bull is no use for the kind of fight which the public taste demands.

In my opinion there are only two solutions. Either the public must go on being satisfied with corridas which are pretty to see and full of accurate and consistent fancy fighting, which is what they have become; or we must go backwards, give the enemy some weapons, and multiply the difficulties instead of reducing them. Let us fight old, tricky, savage, unplayable bulls. Perhaps then the fiesta would awaken again the old passionate enthusiasms; but at the same time it would mean goodbye to the technique of today, goodbye to the fancy figures and the marvellous patterns of bullfighting. We should return to the days when you hunted the bull as best you could.

I don't know whether the *aficionado* of today would enjoy watching anyone fight as Pepe-Hillo fought. I sincerely believe that he wouldn't. I also believe that the bullfighters of today would find it hard to fight bulls like those which Pepe-Hillo killed, and moreover that the public would send them back to the corrals as unplayable.

This, as I honestly know and understand it, is the present

situation of the art of bullfighting. The public will say which it prefers, and the toreros will go on risking their lives to win its applause in the circumstances and conditions which the public taste demands. This is what has always happened and will go on happening.

As far as I am concerned, apart from these technical questions, the most important thing in the fight, on whatever terms it takes place, is the personal accent which the fighter gives it. That is to say, his style.

The style is the bullfighter. It is the colour which the spectacle of the struggle between man and beast, old as the world, takes from a personal temperament, a type of character, an individual spirit. One fights according to what one is. That is what matters. One man's inward emotion must shine through the mechanical movements of the fight. When the bullfighter ends his faena, the tears should come to his eyes, or his lips should be touched with that smile of spiritual fulfilment which a man feels each time that the exercise of his art, however lowly and humble it may be, has made him aware of its divine inspiration.

The seasons of 1934 and 1935 are so near that I cannot see them in their true perspective. I am still too hot from the struggle to be able to speak of them dispassionately. Last year I fought thirty-odd corridas and was gored fourteen or fifteen times. It was a hard battle. The circumstances in which I fight today are as unfavourable as they can be. The public treats my appearances as if each of them was an epoch-making event, and comes expecting to see something almost supernatural, so that whatever I do must be inferior to what they have imagined. I have never found any satisfactory explanation of these popular reactions. In these days I hardly know why I am being applauded or why I am being shouted at.

So I pay no attention. Sometimes it seems to me that they are excessively severe, at other times that they are too enthusiastic; but I go on fighting at the dictation of that inward faith which will always take me back to the arena again and again to go on with my life work. I finished the season of 1934 in this state of mind; and at the beginning of 1935 a bull caught me in Palma de Mallorca and split my collar-bone. The following day a friend rang me up.

"I'm very sorry that the bull split your right collar-bone," he said. "And I'm just as sorry that it didn't split your left collar-bone at the same time and your breast-bone as well. Maybe that would make you stop fighting."

My family and certain other friends held the same hope, which gave me the impression that my craving to go on was making me a bit of a bore, and that I was simply being obstinate about keeping up a struggle which I ought to have given up long ago. This time I thought that I had really reached the end. I decided to finish the season completing the obligations for which I was already contracted, and then to go quietly home.

I set out with this resolution to fight my last corridas; but as if fate was determined to upset my plans, or perhaps because my subconscious mind rebelled against the certainty of a definite retirement, I experienced in those last fights, at which I thought I was only appearing because I had to, a triumphant revival which culminated in the corrida of September 22nd in Madrid. This corrida, and the one which I fought afterwards in Sevilla, were like the breaking of a new dawn. And they gave me the unspeakable happiness of ending as I had begun, and leaving me room to dream that I was only just beginning. For the truth is that I was only born this morning.

All these old stories which it has given me pleasure to recall

JUAN BELMONTE

pale and fade away in the clear light of this morning which is stealing through the windows. Everything I have related is so old, so remote and strange to me, that even I can hardly believe that it happened. I am no longer that desperate little boy of Tablada, nor that ambitious young novillero, nor that dramatic rival of Joselito, nor that conscientious and embittered maestro of the later years . . .

The truth, the only truth, is that I was born this morning.

THE END

AIDE-de-CAMP'S LIBRARY

*Accn. No.....*569*...*

1. Books may be retained for a period not exceeding fifteen days.